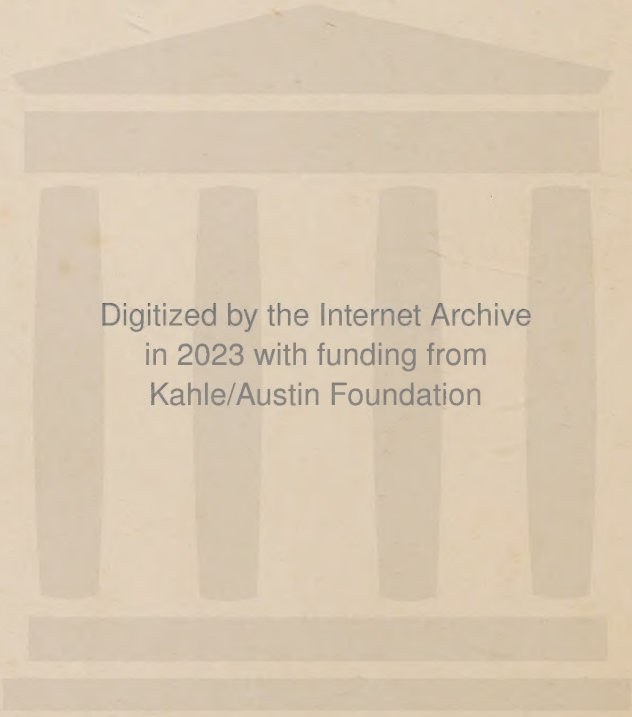
THE CHRIST IMPERATIVE

W. CHARTER PIGGOTT

BS 2415 .P54 C47 1912
Piggott, William Charter,
1872-1943.
The Christ imperative

PRTS
Discarded

Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary
2965 Leonard Street NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
USA
616-977-0599



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/christimperative0000wcha

THE CHRIST IMPERATIVE

THE
CHRIST IMPERATIVE

STUDIES OF THE COMMANDS OF JESUS

BY
W. CHARTER PIGGOTT

LONDON
JAMES CLARKE & CO., 13 & 14, FLEET STREET, E.C.
AND
CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND WALES
MEMORIAL HALL, FARRINGDON STREET, E.C.
1912

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE MAN SET UNDER AUTHORITY	13
II.	THE IMPERATIVE OF OBEDIENCE	27
III.	THE IMPERATIVE OF TEMPTATION	41
IV.	THE IMPERATIVE OF SERVICE	55
V.	THE IMPERATIVE OF SACRIFICE—I.	69
VI.	THE IMPERATIVE OF SACRIFICE—II.	83
VII.	THE IMPERATIVE OF LOVE	97
VIII.	THE IMPERATIVE OF REST	111
IX.	THE IMPERATIVE OF PRAYER	125
X.	THE IMPERATIVE OF CARELESSNESS	139
XI.	THE IMPERATIVE OF PERFECTION	151
XII.	THE MISSIONARY IMPERATIVE	165
XIII.	THE IMPERIAL REWARD	181

FOREWORD

THE Christ of the Gospel story and of the Church's reverence is not simply the winsome and attractive figure, nor the pathetic and suffering Man of Sorrows, between which the imagination of the artist has largely alternated.

There is a face of the Lord, which many of us have seen in the secret chamber when the door was shut, of which no adequate picture has ever come, to my knowledge, from the brush of Art. It is the face of one who deserves with an unique claim that supreme title of monarchy, Imperator, Emperor—the face of "one having authority," of one who confronts men everywhere with an imperative voice, whose word, whether it conveys the gentlest invitation or the sternest monition, has in it the note of command. He says "Follow me" with the power of a military general, and "Do this" with the right of a master, and "Come and rest" with the authority of a physician.

It is with this Christ, who gives orders that must be obeyed, that the studies in the present volume

concern themselves. There are so many excellent studies of the teachings of Jesus, that there would be little justification for, and much presumption on the part of the writer, in adding another to their number. But he desires to treat the teaching, not in the way of general exposition, but rather as reading it in the light of the particular thought which the first chapter of this volume expounds, venturing to hope that though no fresh light may be cast upon the words of the Master, the standpoint from which they are approached may not wholly fail to reinforce allegiance to the Christ imperative.

The writer has been surprised in revising his work to observe how frequently the Fourth Gospel has provided the most pregnant expressions of that dual relationship of Christ as at once under command and commanding which has been the key-note of these studies. He is, of course, not oblivious of the critical questions which surround the work of the last Evangelist, but they do not seem to him to demand discussion here. The ideas advanced in these chapters do not rest upon sayings taken from the Fourth Gospel alone, and are not seriously affected by the consideration of its authorship, date, and character. No aspect of the life and work of our Lord that has been considered but would remain substantially the same if the evidence had been drawn from the synoptic Gospels alone.

These studies had their origin in a series of addresses delivered to a week-evening congregation, and although they have been to some extent recast, it would not have been possible without much further alteration to remove from them every trace of their original form and purpose. It is hoped, however, that the impression of the pulpit will not be so manifest as to disturb the quiet of the reader by the hearth.

I

THE MAN SET UNDER AUTHORITY

I

THE MAN SET UNDER AUTHORITY

"I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers: and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it."—MATTHEW viii. 9.

To that account of the teaching of Jesus which we call the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew has added a note which has its own element of value. "The people," he says, "were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes." Whether the Evangelist gives us here his own interpretation of the astonishment of the crowd, or is quoting the impression of some of the hearers, the comment is of equal interest.

It was not the novelty of the doctrine, it was not any appeal in it to their selfish hopes, that riveted their attention. A careful examination of the sermon reveals little that is in the nature of a popular social programme. It indulges in none of those Utopian pictures with which the greatest of the Old Testament prophets sometimes thrilled their hearers and adorned their pages. It hardly touches material things, save in the way of warning;

it moves throughout on a plane of exalted spiritual thought. There is scarcely a promise in it that is not conditioned by some exacting moral command, and the promises themselves are of a kind to rejoice the hearts of those alone who, like old Simeon, have looked for the redemption of Israel, and not such as have indulged the current hopes of the Messianic kingdom.

From beginning to end the note is that of moral and spiritual demand. Principles of conduct are laid down more far-reaching and searching than the legal precepts to which the people were accustomed. Criticisms are passed upon some of the current ethics, and more boldly still upon their religious examplers, at which the multitude hold their breath.

Yet what chiefly struck them was not the boldness of it all. They were not unused to the wild, ranting speech of political demagogues. Were not such men as Barabbas, and Theudas, and Judas of Galilee in the land? What struck them was the tone of authority, the quiet impressive note of one who had the right to say these things. "It is written in the law thus, but I say unto you thus." It was so natural and powerful that for the moment they heard without a question, and only when he finished with that last figure, in which he compared "these sayings of mine" to the rock foundation of a well-

built house, did they wake with a start to the wonder of the personality that set itself over against the time-honoured words of the law and the tradition of many centuries. And then they registered their sense of the amazing authority of this man as the centre of their astonishment.

May we not say that this first impression has been perpetuated down the ages? Discussion has waged hot warfare round the person of Christ; the theological problems which have been bound up with his mission have torn and rent the Churches; the question: "What manner of man is this and whence hath he this authority?" is still upon the anvil of debate, and who shall predict when the last glowing sparks will be struck out of it? But his authority has been accepted as that of no other teacher of the race. Men have not only read his teaching, they have caught the ring of the voice under whose spell this first audience fell, and have, half-unconsciously perhaps, yielded him the right to speak with an imperative they would take unchallenged from no other.

An old soldier, drowsing on the sunny benches of a square where troops are drilling, will leap to attention at the sound of the officer's voice. An order he has been wont to obey breaks through the tranquil murmur of his dreams to bring him to his feet. Even so the word of Christ strangely renews its power. Again and again it has drawn men to their

feet in spite of themselves. They who, having weighed Christianity in the balances to find it wanting, have set out with a new programme of their own to regenerate the world, find themselves still blazoning its authoritative calls upon their banners. The force of His "Follow me" does not decline, and the feet of men are yet moved by it as the feet of children stir restlessly at the sound of a distant band.

We cannot speak of the authority of Christ without having forced upon us that question, which was suggested in the minds of some of his hearers when their earliest amazement was past, "Whence hath this man this authority?"

This problem vexed some of those who were in contact with Him in those early days of His ministry before anything like a definite opposition had set in. "Is not this the carpenter's son of Nazareth, who has Himself worked at the bench?" said some, and thereby did not solve their wonder, but only added a new note of perplexity to it. They did not think that any clue to His spiritual authority could be found in the carpenter's shop; they simply dismissed, they did not investigate it. There was no enquiry that could be pursued with profit along that line. As we shall see later, they were wrong; there was something they might have discovered at Nazareth if they had had the eyes to see. More

imaginative or superstitious minds sought an explanation in the theory of the incarnation of one of the old prophets, and Herod, stung by a guilty conscience, spoke of Him as John the Baptist risen from the dead.

Faced with the same question, our most natural and simplest answer is that the authority of Jesus finds its spring in His relation to God. He derived it directly from the Father. He spoke the truth as one who had a right to speak it, because He knew the truth by intimate communion with the Eternal. His word was commanding because it was the expression of the Divine will. The full account of it is to be found in the fact that He was the Son of God, speaking as the delegate and representative of His Father. He was, in our sometime phrase, *born to command.*

Now this is doubtless true enough, but it is not the whole truth, and it does not completely cover the fact upon which we have been dwelling. It explains the origin and nature of His commission, but it does not explain in the fullest sense His right to command, nor the impression of the authority of Jesus that has fallen upon men. For as soon as we rise above the authority of the taskmaster in mere mechanical duties, and come to deal with aspects of life in which the mind and the heart, as well as the hands, of men are involved, authority

means something more than a technical right to command.

We have seen the schoolmaster or the foreman, who has all the power that his office and position can give, but of whom we still say that he has no authority. He can command, he can give orders, he can even with infinite trouble get them somehow obeyed, but the results at the best are poor. To hang the keys of knowledge or power at the girdle of a man is not enough to make him a ruler of men. It is not sufficient to equip a prince with all the insignia of office to make him in a real sense a king. There must be some fitness in a man for his position.

In every true authority there is an element which is not derivative, with which no one can be endowed by one outside himself. It is not in the gift of his office, and yet until his office is permeated with it it remains ineffective. That fitness must be of a kind which is recognizable, not only by the one who commissions him, but also by those to whom he is commissioned. A true authority involves a certain attitude towards it on the part of those over whom it is exercised which is not guaranteed simply by its appointment, something which it has to win but cannot arbitrarily claim. Particularly in all moral and spiritual matters this is true. No one has any true authority over me till he has won from me the confession of his right, till he can lead me to say,

" I accept your function to command." As we have said, this is what is so striking in the imperatives of Jesus—that men find themselves almost instinctively confessing his call to obedience, and standing to attention when He speaks.

Doubtless, one may by natural inheritance possess some of the qualities that fit him, whether he attains to the office or not, to be a ruler of men. There is a measure of truth in the popular recognition of a man as born to command. He may have by birth many of the gifts of mind and will that equip him to be a leader and director of others, but we may question whether those gifts would of themselves be adequate.

If we can imagine a prince, who is some day to come to the throne, trained in nothing else but the arts of commanding and ruling others, we may be certain that the result would be a marred and ineffective king. In truth the son of even the most absolute monarch begins his education by learning not how to rule, but how to obey. However great the power he will wield in the future, his earliest days are compassed about with masters and tutors to whose authority he has to submit. He has to follow their guidance, to obey their orders, to accept their commands. Therein lies the discipline which fits him to be a ruler. The measure of his own real authority will depend upon the fulness with which he

has learned to recognize and acknowledge authority. His own imperative will be strong in proportion as he has been taught to respond to the imperative of a higher will than his own. To know how to obey is an essential element in a true right to command.

In that we have the clue to at least one secret of the peculiarly compelling force of the imperative of Jesus. Let us recall the special pleasure He shewed over the centurion, who is the chief figure in the incident from which the words that head this chapter are taken. He came seeking a grace of healing, and with fine modesty would not ask so much as that Jesus should come under his roof. When the Lord heard him He marvelled, and said "Verily I have not found such faith, no, not in Israel."

What was it that so appealed to Christ? Surely it was the faith of the man as expressed in an insight into the position of the Master drawn from a knowledge of his own. He ventured to make a comparison between Christ and himself, and the Lord's heart leaped out to recognize a man who could really understand. What is noticeable is the double aspect of that comparison. He did not only say (though in our reading this is the point on which we often dwell), "I myself know what it is to give orders, I have soldiers under me. I say to one 'Go,' and he goes; to another 'Come,' and he comes; to my

servants 'Do this,' and they do it. You may have spiritual forces at your command as I have my battalions, You have but to speak the word and my servant will be healed." He did say that, but something more. He included Jesus with himself in an earlier statement. "I also, like you, am a man set under authority." I too, he said, know what it means both to obey and command. I too stand between those whom I order and those from whom I take my orders. I can do the one because I do the other.

It was the twofold aspect of this man's confession that won such approval from Christ. In however glimmering a way, this centurion had seen that Jesus Himself stood under an imperative: that His life was governed by a higher will than His own. He saw the truth which the Lord had to state plainly for some of his hearers: "I came not to do My own will but the will of Him that sent Me." He recognized and hailed Jesus as a man set under authority. There is a sense in which we may say that, seeing the Lord, he had seen the Father, and confessed Jesus as a son going about His Father's business.

This is the truth we shall have occasion to observe and dwell upon in many relations in the course of the following chapters. We are about to listen to the imperative voice of the Lord, to ponder some of the great commandments He lays upon His own to,

try afresh to bring our hearts and minds and wills into submission. We are no more able than those of old to avoid the question, "Whence hath He this authority?"—not only whence did He get the commandment, but where did He find this compelling right to command? We answer, reverently, in both cases from God; but we find that He attained the second not by derivation but by obedience. We shall see that there is not a single one of His great imperatives which does not find the spring of its power in His own filial obedience to the same or a similar imperative, as He received it direct from God. The Christ imperative is a Christ under imperative; and we are Christ's because Christ is God's.

Our subject in this first study has been of necessity introductory in its character, but as we conclude we may gather something of the comfort and help that lie in the thought that has been under our observation. How often have we felt, as we have moved about under the command of others, that it is a much easier thing to give orders than to obey them. We felt it in our schooldays when the master imposed his tasks, in our apprenticeship and subordination in the business world, and sometimes in our religion as its exacting demands have been impressed on us. We have suspected a certain irresponsibility in those who so easily set us to our work but did not touch it themselves with their own fingers.

There are occasions when the suspicion is justified. There are Egyptian taskmasters in the modern as in the ancient world. It is a definite temptation of those who can command the hands of others, to bind heavy burdens upon them without vividly realizing how much they ask. But this is never true in our contacts with the Lord. We take the great commandment of our religion from the lips of one who, took upon him the form of a servant, whose first lesson was not how to command, but how to obey We receive our orders from one who was Himself set under authority. We may walk the hardest road of duty, saying "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me"; with me not only as a leader and general, an imperator, a king of kings, but also as a fellow-servant, whose kindest word expresses that sympathetic oneness of obedience and says "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me."

II

THE IMPERATIVE OF OBEDIENCE

II

THE IMPERATIVE OF OBEDIENCE.

"And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He was subject to them."—LUKE ii. 51.

"Ye are My friends if ye do the things which I command you."—JOHN xv. 14.

IN the previous study we observed the peculiar sense of authority with which the teaching of Jesus impressed His first hearers, and which perpetuated itself down the ages so that there is still no voice in the ears of men that has so compelling an imperative as His. We were led further to consider the question: "Whence hath this man this authority?" and we found at least one aspect of the answer in the fact that He himself was a man set under authority. He won the right to speak with an imperative voice by standing under imperative in His own life. He said "I must" before He said "Ye must." We ventured to predict that we should find all His great imperatives drawing the spring of their power from His own filial fulfilment of a like imperative as He received it from God. In the present study we propose to deal with the imperative of Christ in its simplest form, under the heading of obedience, and we have brought

together two passages which remind us of two striking aspects of the subject.

In the passage from John, Jesus states the condition of His friendship. It is uncompromising, and at first glance would not seem to suggest a promising opening for friendship. The offer of our friendship to another on the condition that he did whatever we wanted to do would not win a very enthusiastic response. It reminds us of those somewhat whimsical and fragile friendships of childhood, which were established on this basis, and broke down suddenly in anger and tears before the clash of two stubborn wills, each of which wished to be the ruling partner in the amicable alliance. We no longer attempt to begin our companionships in so tyrannical a mood; we make our tenders rather in the form of giving than exacting. We recognize the obligations of mutual compliance, of the duty to give and take, to look not only on our own things, but also on the things of others in the pleasures of friendship.

Yet without open expression, and often perhaps unconsciously we do make conditions and demands. We require certain qualities in our friends. They must, to some extent, do the things we like, and avoid the thing we dislike. We look for some tastes in common as the basis of our harmony. There are habits which make it practically impossible for us to be friends, or which keep our friendship

ever at the breaking point. The man who laughs scornfully at the things we hold sacred, who gravely wrongs our canons of morality and decency, or whose every inclination is to pull down what we are trying to build up, thereby puts himself outside the pale of intimate fellowship. The very choice of friends implies standards, and we have the right to make what standards we will and take the consequences. If our standards are high and exacting, we shall have few friends, but perhaps they will be of the best. If our standards are low and easy, we may have more, but their quality will not be as their quantity.

Christ is therefore justified, even by our ordinary habits, in making the conditions under which He will call men his friends. The only difference is that He states them openly, while in general they are only expressed by the choice we make; and that they are at once higher and more arbitrary than those we should impose. He makes friends on the terms on which the army makes soldiers and the employer engages a servant—those of obedience. He says practically: "Give Me the right to command and I will be your friend. Come to Me on the terms of a servant, and you shall stay with Me on the terms of a friend. Give Me obedience and I will give you friendship."

If we want to know Christ and to grow into living

fellowship with Him, if we wish to be able to speak of Him as a friend, there is only one way. We must begin like the guest at the wedding feast, by taking the lowest place. Like the prodigal who pleaded, not " Restore me to my place and privilege as the younger son " but " Make me as one of thy hired servants," so we must come to Him, not asking first for the rights of comradeship, but for the humble privilege of serving Him. We must bring to Him as our earliest gift the spirit of a willing and ready obedience.

All those men and women whose devotional works are now the inspiration of the spiritual thought of the world, men like Thomas à Kempis, and Francis de Sales, and Samuel Rutherford, women like Madam Guyon and St. Theresa, over whose writings we marvel at the tender intimacy into which they have grown with Christ, and half-sadly wonder whether it is ever possible for us to have such fellowship with Him, began in this way. To attain to the number of His friends each of them took upon himself the form of a servant.

Look at that small company of the twelve, who had been gathered about Him for two or three years and to whom He spoke these words, and see how absolutely, underneath the fair and gladsome appearance of their fellowship, their mutual relation was that of master and servants. The initiative was

always with Christ. He never consulted with them, never asked their advice. He sometimes cast a problem upon them, but it was as an educational exercise, never as actually seeking their help. "He Himself knew what He would do." The occasions on which we find them acting independently are nearly always records of mistakes. They forbade one casting out devils because he followed not with them; they would have called down fire from heaven to consume the stubborn Samaritans; Peter would turn his Lord back from His purposes—they were all wrong. In preaching, in the organization of their labours, even in such details as the arrangements of the entry into Jerusalem and the appointments of the Last Supper, He was supreme and they worked under His authority. He did not hesitate to ask, and they gave in response an unqualified obedience. Like the heroes of Balaclava, it was "theirs not to reason why, theirs not to make reply, theirs but to do and die."

Let us suggest again that the attitude of the Master, though stringent, is not unfair. When Ananias and Sapphira brought a part of their property as the whole to the early Church, Peter's argument in condemning them was: "You were under no unavoidable law, you were under no compulsion. While your property remained was it not in your own power?" So it may be said with regard

to the disciples of Jesus, that discipleship is not thrust upon any man. Though Christ says " Follow Me," it is in a man's own power to respond or to decline. Our attitude to Him is initially free. We may be disciples or not, as we choose ; but if we are disciples, then it must be on His own terms. We may seek His friendship or not as we like ; but if we will have His friendship, it must be according to His own conditions.

This is His first claim—uncompromising obedience. His disciples must obey Him first, and learn to understand Him afterwards. They must accept His commandments before they can hope to know Him. " If any man will do His will he shall know." In the religion of Jesus arbitrary obedience has a place. He is quite sure that it is a good thing, that it is a valuable discipline for these servants of His, to do things just because He says so, and without hesitating upon the " why " and the " wherefore." But He does not propose to perpetuate it, to make blind, unreasoning obedience the end of discipleship. It is to give place to understanding and knowledge. " What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter," he says to Peter. " I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now," He says on another occasion.

Here in this word from John's gospel we stand at

a point at which He shadows forth a further development in his relation to His tried disciples : " Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you," He says. " You have given Me faithful service, and in recognition of it I give you a further title, and draw you into a closer intimacy than you have known before. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends." Rational, understanding, enlightened fulfilment of the law of the higher life, then, is what Jesus seeks. But that His disciples should be in the right spirit towards Him is of more importance than that they should understand. That they should learn how to obey is more necessary than that they should learn how to reason.

Let us recognize, then, that there is a place in life for the principle of arbitrary obedience, or, to state it more accurately, for an obedience that is not based upon the understanding of the reason, for an obedience that lies back of all our questions why and how things are to be so.

Nature herself exacts it, or makes us pay serious penalties if we decline. Her laws work, whether we understand them or not, and the man who stands parleying with the earthquake or the thunderbolt makes a mistake that costs him dear. As Huxley says : " With Nature it is not a word and a blow, with the blow first ; but the blow without the word.

You are left to find out why your ears are boxed." Nature is a somewhat rigorous mistress, but, notwithstanding, she is a very true friend to her children. Yet her friendship is strictly conditioned by obedience; she says: "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you."

Again, in the sphere of the home and in the general process of education there is an obedience that lies back of knowledge and understanding. There are things in the life of the child which it has to do because the parent says so, not because it understands them, and for which other motives have to be found than those of reason. The very beginnings of education rest upon certain fundamental authorities that have to be recognized and obeyed before even the elementary training of the mind can begin.

That sooner or later arbitrary control must give place to explanation is undoubtedly true, and the point at which that comes is one of very delicate decision. There is danger in the perpetuation of a purely arbitrary authority, but there may be equal danger in giving the reins of power too soon into the hands of the reason. It does not follow that when a child begins to ask "Why this?" and "Why that?" the time has come to back up every commandment with an explanation of its purpose. That may simply develop a rather painful precocity from which some of the finer moral traits are wholly absent.

Reason soon becomes a very swaggering thing if it is allowed too early and without restraint to take a dominant place in the life. We do not learn love, we do not learn reverence, we do not learn trust, by doing things because they are reasonable. There are other principles of obedience in life beside the fact that the commandment is reasonable. There is a certain essential truth of authority and subordination that is implied in the very nature of some of the common relations of life, those of parent and child, of master and scholar, and in the fulfilment of them lie some of the qualities without which the moral tone of life is thin and hollow.

These the Lord Himself recognized as being of the very fabric of life as God had made it, and therefore not lightly to be set aside. We may look briefly at the incident of the other verse quoted at the head of this study. We have just had a glimpse of the early religious development of Jesus, of the wonderful opening even of His child mind towards the things of God. Taken up to Jerusalem at the age of twelve, he had been missed from the company on the return journey to Galilee, and after troubled search He was found in the temple among the doctors, hearing and answering them questions. Men who in after-life would be bitterly opposed to Him were gathered around Him now in recognition of the marvellous child. They wondered at His

understanding and His answers. Do not let us think of it as though there was anything miraculous or uncanny about it, nor, on the other hand, as simply a display of youthful precocity. It was surely, as His own word would suggest, the religious quality of this young mind—its piety, its purity, its hint of something hid from the wise and prudent but revealed unto babes; for there is something at once deep and innocent in His reply to His parents: "Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?"

It would seem as though Jesus had in spirit already outgrown the limits of the little house in Nazareth; but He went back with His parents, and was subject unto them. More and more in the unfolding of the years a difference was growing out —an originality and separateness of spirit; He saw a form they could not see and heard a voice they did not hear. Mary realized that there was something wonderful and strange about this son of hers. He was not as other mothers' sons in the village. But He did not break away. He claimed no extraordinary privilege of His spiritual genius. As we understand from one gospel, He actually followed the calling of His father and worked at the carpenter's bench. If there were ever any validity in the tradition of Corban, how readily might Christ have claimed, "That whereby thou mightest have

been profited is given to God," but He obeyed the ordinary common rule of the home.

The time came when with the right of a man He broke away into a larger world; but if He had been asked why He did not take the authority of His life into His own hands before, why He went down with His parents and was subject unto them, may we not be sure that He would have said: "The home has its law and its right. I was subject to Mary because I was Mary's son. I obeyed her because she was My mother; I fulfilled her commandments because the bond of filial love was between us, and because she had the right of love to My obedience. I was subject to her because reverence, and love, and trust, have their obligations as well as reason."

Yes, and it is more fundamentally important in life to develop the strength of love, and reverence, and trust, than it is to understand everything. So Jesus brought His disciples, and He would bring us, under the same education first of all. He would develop our reverence, our love, our trust, as our initial relations to Himself. These are primarily required, if we are to be worthy to be His friends; and He develops them by asking of us an unhesitating obedience. He says: "You shall know all in good time; but first learn to obey Me. Do you recognize in Me a master? Then trust Me, do the things I say. Are you inclined to love Me? Then

if you love Me keep My commandments. In the dark, or in the light, understanding or not understanding, be loyal to Me. Keep My commandments, and you shall become My friends, and you shall understand what your Lord does. But unless you will trust Me to the point of obedience I cannot explain. First follow, then see; first obey, then understand; first trust, then know."

III

THE IMPERATIVE OF TEMPTATION

III

THE IMPERATIVE OF TEMPTATION

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."—MATTHEW iv. 1.

"Lead us not into temptation."—MATTHEW vi. 1.

THERE stands at the outset of the public ministry of Christ one imperative which is full of gravity and awe. The ministry of John the Baptist had roused the sluggish conscience of the people. His call to repentance, stern and reminiscent of the older prophets had drawn many out to flinch under his hard words and to seek counsel for amendment. The religious leaders gave a dignified and tepid countenance to his work; but there were those in the multitude—publicans, soldiers, common working folk—whose response was genuine and sincere. Among them had come Jesus. John met Him with quiet protest; there is no trait in this rugged character finer than this. He said; "My mission is not to such as you. I preach to this multitude, my soul is sick for their sins; but I can love the higher when I see it. If there is to be baptism between us two, you must be the baptist." Then Jesus constrained him.

It is difficult to say how clear was Christ's consciousness of His mission as He stood on the Jordan's banks. We do not know what is the full meaning of His word: "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness"; but His baptism stands out as a great act of self-identification with His people, with the sinful, conscience-stricken, erring people. Therein was defined the first difference in His ministry from that of John. John stood separate, sternly aloof, from the multitude he baptised. Jesus took His place with them—with them in their sin and their repentance. He wanted to call them brethren, and "it behoved Him in all points to be made like unto His brethren,"—that at least He saw.

It is surely significant that in that hour and act of identification with men the heavens were opened unto Him, and He arose from the waters of the river with the Divine voice in His ears: "Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It was the hour of His consecration. Whatever we can say of the previous days, from this day He is commissioned to His task. He must say now "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, and He hath anointed Me."

In the account of what followed the three earlier Evangelists all agree, Mark only, in his vivid way, using a more emphatic word than the others. "The Spirit driveth Him," he says, where they write

"He was led by the Spirit." But, led or driven, their testimony is clear. The first imperative movement of the Spirit was to thrust Christ to a face-to-face encounter with temptation. His identification with the people was to be one of no mere verbal sympathy. He must know the tug and the strain of the battle under which they have succumbed. He must front sin with the buttons off the foils and the deadly earnest of a soul at stake in the encounter.

What happened in the wilderness we do not know. We have, indeed, a brief, placid record that must have been His own; but only the unimaginative can fail to see that it hides more than it reveals. It is a veil, with a few words written upon it, covering the secret of the Lord. These sentences at once suggest and withdraw from us forty days of spiritual conflict. They recount the facts as the general's brief and dry report of the battle to headquarters does. It tells the time and the place, the disposition of the troops, the line of advance, and the conquering stratagem; but the heat and the passion of the strife, the tumult of a thousand hearts, the gust of fear, the sickening revulsion, the berserker rage, leave no mark on these formal and precise lines. Even so Matthew's and Luke's narratives hint the reality of the temptation of Christ. It grew out of His spiritual endowment; it came to Him as it comes to other men—on the flowing tide of capacity and power.

Over all possession, whether material or mental, or even spiritual, good and evil strive, like Michael and the Devil for the body of Moses in the old legend. Man has no gift but the Prince of Darkness will fight for it. The temptation to use a great endowment for personal ends, the temptation to compromise with evil for a speedier victory, the temptation to use meretricious means to gain a desired aim, how real they are! Jesus had to face them; the very fulness of the Spirit drove Him to meet the encounter. But what it meant for Him, how gravely mind and heart were strained in the conflict, that is left untold. Yet, let us beware of the danger, through any false, however well-intentioned, reverence for the person of the Lord, of minimizing the reality of His temptation. He was not driven by the Spirit into the wilderness for a polite and conventional bout with evil. It was a genuine imperative that was laid upon Him here. His work demanded it. Only one that had been tempted could succour them that are tried.

It was His own obedience to the imperative of temptation, as one tempted like as we are yet without sin, that gave Him the right of an imperative voice in this matter also; and it is as we turn to this that we get a hint of what lay hidden behind the veil of the wilderness story.

If you have noted the conjunction of the words at the head of this study, it may have struck you

that the principle we have proposed to trace in the commandments of Jesus is here broken. We have said that we should not find one of the great imperative words of the Master that did not draw the secret of its power from His own fulfilment of the same imperative. You have perhaps interpreted this to mean " I have the right to ask of you what I have asked of Myself; I claim your obedience because I have been subject to authority; I bid you take the cross because I have taken the cross. I call you to work because I have done the works of Him that sent Me. I lay the commandment of love upon you because I Myself have fulfilled it." That is true, and some of these imperatives we have yet to consider.

In line with this we might have expected that out of His own conflict with temptation His word would run : " I call upon you to endure temptation because I endured temptation." That is true also. He does say that. There grows out through all His teaching a constant appeal to the endurance of His disciples —an endurance to the very end, based upon the fidelity and victory of their Lord.

But, all the same, that is not His distinctive emphasis in the subject we are considering. Our present subject brings out a certain relation between the obedience and the commandments of Jesus that we shall not find so clearly evident in any other of our

topics. That Christ stood under imperative gave Him the right to speak with an imperative voice; that is true, but that is not all it did. It gave Him the knowledge of the weight of the imperative, the strain of the burden.

The man who has gone through every stage and process of the business of which he is now the head knows the meaning and implication of the orders he gives. The father who has not forgotten what it meant to be a son knows the tension of the commandments he issues. The best gift which the fulfilment of a commandment brings to the issue of a commandment is sympathy, the intimacy of a fellow-feeling. The master or the father who simply says: "I went through the ruck, and so must you. I bought my experience at bitter cost, and so must you. I had to work hard, and so must you," is brutalizing and blunting a truth. He has only coarsely learned the lesson of experience if he would hand it on unchanged and with no new contribution from his own life. Surely he ought to have learned some discrimination between the helpful and the harmful elements in the burden that he carried.

Must not all of us, if there be any tenderness and wisdom in us, as we trace the lines of our past experience say: "Here was a yoke I bore in my youth that was wholly good for me; it was of the very making of manhood that I had to fulfil such duties

and imperatives. I would fearlessly lay the same upon those that come after me." Then, again, as we turn another page we say: "If by God's grace I can avoid it, my child shall never have to bear what I bore there. His spirit shall never be broken, and he shall never come under such oppression and tyranny. It is enough that I had to pass under that burden; let it end with me, let it never be perpetuated." Yet, again, there are some experiences of our life that are written in blood; the agony of sweat and travail is upon them. We can hardly measure their cost, we cannot count their value; the Spirit of God was in them. But we dare not attempt lightly to lead another soul along that road. We dare not even wish that one may find it. It lay too near the confines of the night; it was imperilled on every side. Even with the sense that out of it there came spiritual gain, we know that it was snatched so close to the borders of loss that we hope others may not have to take that path.

So, indeed, out of the imperative of Christ's temptation came the right to say: "Endure temptation; I endured temptation, too." But the most illuminating revelation of the depth of his experience is that He says to us: "I was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. Out of that I command you, when you pray, to say, 'Lead us not into temptation.'"

I know nothing that can impress on us the vividness of the Lord's temptation like the conjunction of His experience with this prayer. That He is a man set under authority gives Him the right to command, and He exerts it to the full. But out of His obedience comes something more than authority —even sympathy and tenderness. He knows the weight of the burden, the strain of the commandment. He says, unhesitatingly: "Take up the cross; I have carried it, I know how heavy it is, and I do not scruple to command you to bear it after Me." He says: "Love one another; I know the difficulties, but I have mastered them. I have loved you, and I do not hesitate to lay this new commandment upon you." He says: "I send you out, for My name's sake, into a world where you will meet with hard treatment. You may have to face imprisonment, persecution, death. As the master so shall the servant be. I do not hesitate at this, I know what I ask. It is not beyond your strength. I have felt the sting of the reed on My face, the pressure of the thorns on My brow. You can do this for Me." He has felt the imperative, and He does not scruple to impose it.

But there is one burden which He fully knows, yet shrinks from laying upon us; one thing in which His own victory never led Him to speak lightly of the hope of victory, but rather filled Him with tender

concern and sympathy for His disciples. Out of His own contact with temptation He comes to say: "My brothers, sin is an awful fact, and temptation is terrible! It is woven into the fabric of life, and sometimes the Spirit of God has to lead a man straight up to it that he may do battle with it and overcome. But it is not to be wished for, not to be courted. I would not simply have you pray that you may master temptation. I would have you pray: 'Thy will be done; but, if it be possible, lead us not into temptation.' Only by the holy fear of it, which finds its highest expression in prayer, will you be made strong, and humble, and pure enough to face it if the imperative should fall."

It is one of the amazements of the Gospel story, that while we search its pages and find no hint of sin in any feature of the Master's life, no sign even of a passing defeat, but personal victory all along the line from Nazareth to Calvary, yet the whole narrative is tremulous with the sense of the danger of moral evil. This Man who comes from every conflict with the powers of darkness unscathed, says it is better to put any limitation on life, to go maimed, or halt, or lame, rather than to risk the grave fear of loss. This Lord, who is Himself triumphant, trembles for His disciples. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith may not fail."

Whatever else we may learn from our Gospel, if we have, indeed, the mind of Christ we shall never learn to take light views of sin or to entertain flippant and familiar thoughts of temptation.

To our Master temptation was a terrible thing. It is a splendid thing when it is mastered : " Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life." Yes, our Lord knew that ; knew that He came from the wilderness more able to help men, more perfectly equipped to be their Saviour, knew that it all lay in the path of His redemptive work. He knows, too, that every one of His disciples, who successfully endures temptation is the stronger and the purer for it, and that in varying degrees, according to their capability and their work, temptation is the lot of all. Yet from His own experience He came with so awed a sense of the issues of temptation, light and darkness, truth and falsehood, hope and despair, the gain and loss of the soul balanced in the scale, that He said in effect to His servants and friends : " There is only one attitude towards temptation. It is too serious to be lightly risked, to be played with, to be adventured upon in any careless mood. Evil has unexpected reinforcements ; it has a thousand surprise attacks. You must watch and pray against it. The only safe attitude is to avoid it, to shrink from it. When it comes you

must meet it, and when you are in temptation you must trust in God and fight for the life of the soul. But never go to seek it. Arm your soul with a dread of the encounter of sin that shall keep you truly alert. A holy fear is the best assurance of vigilance and your strongest security. Let it find expression even in your prayer. Let God Himself know you as men who pray not to be led into temptation, whose spirits are purposed by resolution and by aspiration to avoid the contacts of evil. It may be that sometimes God must lead you for some great purpose of His work to direct encounter with temptation. But only if you have shrunk from it and prayed to be delivered from it will you be sure that it is God indeed who does lead you, and have the assurance : ' My grace is sufficient for thee and My strength shall be made perfect in thy weakness.' "

IV

THE IMPERATIVE OF SERVICE

IV

THE IMPERATIVE OF SERVICE

"We must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day."—JOHN ix. 4.

As the ordinary English reader knows from the occasional different renderings of a text that are given in the margin of his Bible, there are often slight variations in the early manuscripts from which our Bible is translated and in the present case there are two alternatives; either of which seems to give a somewhat more natural reading than that of the text. There are a certain number—not of the oldest documents which read: "I must work the works of Him that sent Me;" and there are a few, and of these one at least of first-class authority, which render: "We must work the works of Him that sent us." Either of these appeals to our sense of consistency; but on the whole the conjunction of manuscripts, on which we are most accustomed to rely for a correct text, justify the translation which the Revisers have adopted.

From the standpoint of the narrative it matters little which we follow; but so far as our present study

is concerned there is a special interest in the received reading. Nor need we hesitate to emphasize the lesson that is conveyed in this particular form of the words of Jesus, since it does not depend for its truth upon the accident of this sentence and the singularly appropriate expression it here finds. We shall not be establishing a principle of Christ upon a slender and doubtful foundation, for the principle itself will be found running right through the collective ministry of the Lord and His apostles. But no brief statement of it could be found better than this.

That the imperatives of Christ find the key of their power in the imperatives He Himself recognized and obeyed is the key-note of these studies; and here we see Jesus gathering Himself and His disciples under a common imperative on the basis and ground of a commission which is all His own. He says: "We must work, I the Master and you the disciples, we must work the works of Him that sent Me."

He at once combines the disciples with Him, and yet isolates Himself from them. He calls them to co-operation, and yet clearly states the superiority and uniqueness of His own position. Their commission is derivative—they receive it from Him; His own is direct and immediate from the Father. He stands before them—one sent from God, one who knows the work that is to be done, what the

Father wants doing, one who has come into the world full of understanding and purpose.

To Him life is not an experiment with unknown elements and forces. He is not an explorer tracking an untrodden country. He did not come into the world from the bosom of the Eternal, as Abraham went out from Ur of the Chaldees—not knowing whither he went. He did not come to repeat those baffling and baffled questions which the men of all ages have addressed to the universe and scattered upon its wandering winds, the questions which have shivered and broken into a thousand doubts, and in attempting to answer which the mind has rocked from the borders of hope to the confines of despair, the questions which have written the books of Job and Ecclesiastes and the great Greek tragedies, which have spent themselves in the wildest philosophies and tempted the soul to the weirdest traffic with the unseen. Why and wherefore? Is there any meaning and purpose and end to it all? Is there any object in this little scrambling life of man who endures for a time and then drops into an abyss from which no bubble rises and no whisper comes?

Some of you who have read that strange and in many ways powerful book, "The Story of an African Farm," may remember the picture of the boy Waldo, with his poor, thwarted life, lying out on

the veldt idly watching his dog and a beetle, and recall the sad words with which the chapter ends: "And it was all play, and no one could tell what it had lived or worked for. A striving and a striving and an ending in nothing."

These words seem to us the pathetic refrain of a good deal of human wandering. But Jesus was not a philosopher nor an enquirer. We never find Him with ruffled brow bending over the mystery of life, wondering about the meaning of the hardest facts, asking of the world its purpose and its end. Where other men ask questions He asks none. "Why was I born?" cries Job, and the question echoes from a thousand hearts. Jesus knows: "To this end was I born." "'Then what is life?' I cried," wrote Shelley, and the interrogation mark is the last stroke of his broken life. Jesus knows: "This is life." "What shall we do and to what end?" say the sons of men with the primal curse of sweat of brain and brow upon them, "What profit hath man of all his labour under heaven?" But Jesus knows: "We must work the works of Him that sent Me." He stands in the world's eye a clear and unperplexed labourer with no doubt of His work. He brings His purpose with Him into the world. He says: "I came not to do Mine own will but the will of Him that sent Me."

This impression of one sent from God, before

whom life opened in an intelligible and plain programme, does not rest upon the reading of an occasional text, it is written upon every line of His life. His consciousness of it is an amazing thing. We see it even in the boy of twelve on his visit to the temple : " Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business." It is not less unmistakable when at the close of His life the grown man stands at the judgment bar of Pilate : " For this cause came I into the world—that I might bear witness unto the truth." This sense of purpose and destiny is His constant inspiration. He passes through the common experiences of humanity, but in disappointment, in weariness and hunger, He turns to this for spiritual refreshing. " My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work." We feel through the whole record of His life and activity the presence of assurance and strength. His purposes are stated with the simplest clearness : " The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister ; He came to seek and to save that which was lost." His movements are all taken with quiet determination ; neither the applause nor the criticism of men turn him aside. We never see Him feeling after a purpose or a line of action as we do ourselves, confused by the conflicting pressures that circumstances bring to bear. Those words which in John's gospel are on the lips of Christ, " I know

whence I came and whither I go," are the expression of what we feel with regard to Him.

We do not mean to suggest that in any unnatural way Jesus from the very beginning of His life, or even of His public ministry, foresaw the course of His own career ; that even in the brightest days of Galilee the shadow of Jerusalem and the certainty of Calvary lay upon His mind. Such an idea reduces His life to a mechanical and unreal thing. Surely the mind of the Master unfolded gradually, the actual events of His life unrolled before Him as ours do before us. Coming events cast their shadows before them, only more definitely for Him than they do for us, as His intents were purer and His inward life less distracted.

But behind everything else lay this sense of purpose. He is supremely the man with a mission. He feels God behind Him, He is sent from God ; He knows the meaning of life—what God meant it for, what God wants to have done. He knows what God is working for, and that gives the direction to His own labours : " My Father worketh even until now, and I work." He expresses the will of God as one to whom it is a clear and unclouded vision. " It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." " This is the will of God—that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." " This is the will of God—that I should lose nothing of all

that He hath given Me." The "works of Him that sent Me" are certain and definite. They are the works of redemption—to proclaim liberty to the captive and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to give joy for mourning, to bring rest to the weary, to shed light on those that sit in darkness, to restore life to those for whom it has declined, to draw men from all their wanderings back to the heart of God and to establish His kingdom.

So the Lord stands in the world under an unmistakable imperative of service, a supremely impressive and compelling figure in our vision, the figure of one who knows what He lives and dies for. Amid all the shadows of life, amid all the questionings about the meaning and the end of existence, amid all the perplexed and troubled sons of men, who know not why they are here, and are drudging through a blind existence from the cradle to the grave; amid all who say life is a riddle, a tangled web, a mystery in which we find neither beginning nor end, a vapour that appeareth but for a little while; amid all our little systems with their broken lights and our philosophies that snatch at half a truth, He stands convinced in His purpose, definite in His aim. While men figure life as the bird that flits for a moment in the light of a smoky fire out of the darkness and into the darkness again, He knows that He came from God and goes to God. He is sure

of the purpose of God, He does without hesitation "the works of Him that sent Me."

It is not difficult to see how this life translates itself into an imperative for all of us, how "I must work the works of Him that sent Me" is changed into "*We* must work the works of Him that sent Me." One man, conscious that He was sent from God, gathers others into the unity of His purpose, and out of the definiteness of His own life lends definiteness to theirs. One life that knows why it has lived turns other lives from chaos into order. Though but one man has climbed to the summit of a mountain, it is no longer inaccessible; the failure of a thousand men to reach it cannot make it so again. Though only one foot has crossed the desert, it has made a track, it can never more be described as the untraversed waste. One life sent from God is enough to illuminate the world; one life with a purpose coming into the world makes it a world with a purpose in it. "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened."

This is abundantly illustrated in many minor ways in our ordinary daily life. We see it in the organization of business. Here is a concern, unwieldy, confused, full of wasted strength and bad management. It is not paying its way, it is threatened with disaster; yet it needs only one man to reduce it to order. One man with purpose and

understanding, who knows what he is working for, will draw the thousand heads and hands and feet into co-operation. They will be redeemed from confusion, they will become effective and purposeful, through the purpose that is in him. We see it in the ordering of war. It took but one Cromwell to make an army of Ironsides. It took but one Napoleon with an indomitable aim to weld together an army with regard to which our amazement still is that it was able to hold the allies of Europe at bay and to vex them for so long.

We see it in the ways of intellectual life. The influence of the single mind can never be calculated. From one brain comes the thought that makes a hundred thousand lives intelligible. In some lonely study a man thinks out an idea, masters some truth, and, whether he will or not, he is setting at work an imperative that cannot be disobeyed. He is commanding the activities of men for centuries to come. He has added something to the life of the world that makes it different, and through days and years men will work the works of the truth born in that student's cell.

So the transition of Jesus from an imperative which He obeyed to one in which He linked other men with Himself was natural and necessary. The purpose of His life made other lives purposeful. The vision of that strong convinced life, doing the works

of the Father, sure that God sent Him, sure that redemption and liberty and life were the works of God, has captured the imagination and mastered the wills of a multitude that cannot be numbered.

He has given an imperative to the social service of twenty centuries. The work which He did has decided the work of the whole modern world; His aim runs through the whole. Our philanthropy, our care for the weak, our thought for the disabled, our consideration of the children, have their spring in His activities. In pursuing them we do the works of Him that sent Christ. He set a movement on foot that nothing has been able to stay. The seeking of the lost, the saving of the sinful, the strengthening of the weak, the recovery of the lowest, the least, the last—the whole service of pity and compassion—His purpose, *His* because never demonstrated as the supreme ends of life till He stood among us, the Man sent from God, have given their marching orders to the centuries that followed. Once revealed they have become the purpose of the world. Men have attempted to stand against it, and its imperative has swept them aside.

The Emperor Julian tried to break the force of the gospel of redemption and to reinstate the ancient gods of power and beauty, but his dying words on his last battlefield were: "O Galilean, thou hast conquered." The modern Nietzsche has made an

attack upon the gospel of pity, but it is no dangerous prophecy to say that the ages will still be doing the works of Him that sent Christ when Nietzsche is all but forgotten.

A prominent modern Socialist made an attack upon Christianity a few years ago because he found it in his way. "It was because I found religion in my way," he writes, "that I have attacked it." It needs again no prophecy to foretell the end of that. It is as though a man attacked the laws of Nature because they were in his way. "Whosoever falleth upon this stone shall be broken, but upon whomsoever it shall fall it shall grind him as powder." The man who is attempting to help the world other than in the line of the purpose of Christ is but piling up disappointment for himself and for his children, and leaving the world with its gravest questions still unanswered and its deepest needs unmet.

For us who love Him there is no avoiding this imperative of purpose and service. We can but be glad when He links us with Himself, and says; "We must work the works of Him that sent Me." Those first disciples of His—Peter, and John, and James, and Thomas, and Matthew—were men of the ordinary daily world, working as many thousands around them worked, but with no clear sense of destiny and aim in life. There was no special end in their

existence, so far as they knew. They would live and die, but what it was all about they did not understand. But there came into their existence this Man sent from God, and in His purpose they found their own. They responded to His call for service, and life became worth living. "As the Father hath sent Me even so send I you," He said, and as His apostles they discovered themselves.

There is no way of escaping from the teasing riddle of life, from the wonder what it is all about, and from the sickening fear that it amounts to nothing—"a striving and a striving, and an ending in nothing"—no way but the response of the soul to Christ's imperative call to service. "Come and do the works of Him that sent Me; come and labour at My side; come and fill your lives with My purpose; come and lose them in My purpose, and you shall find them."

V

THE IMPERATIVE OF SACRIFICE—I

V

THE IMPERATIVE OF SACRIFICE—I

"From that time began Jesus to shew unto His disciples how that He must go into Jerusalem and suffer many things."—MATTHEW xvi. 21.

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."—MATTHEW xvi. 24.

WE now approach the most impressive of all the imperatives of Jesus, the one in which He not only foretold that suffering might be the possible fate of those who followed Him, but boldly and without hesitation claimed a willingness to face it as the true pledge of discipleship.

There rises before us at the outset the curious and interesting critical question how far this particular injunction to carry the cross was dictated by a clear prevision of the method of His own death. Was it because He knew definitely that His own life was to end on the cross that He uttered this word to His followers? There are some who think this reference to the cross so unintelligible, apart from His own crucifixion, and who yet so greatly shrink from the implication that Christ was endowed with a

supernatural knowledge of His fatal destiny, that they have not hesitated to suggest that this saying owes its form to the influence of the disciples' thought after the death of the Lord, and that in His actual utterance this reference to the cross was absent.

We share their dislike to the idea that Christ had supernatural knowledge of the character of His end, not because it is impossible, but because it militates against the truth of His humanity. One who is to be man as we are men must not only face the present as we have to face it, but must also face the future as we have to face it—as a dim horizon from whose mists there gradually grow out things that are certain in the fulfilment of destiny. The evidence of the Gospel narrative seems to indicate that the future only slowly and in large outline unfolded itself before Him. As the conflict of His message with the official religious mind of His day became clear, He saw at first that He could only pursue His way at the risk of suffering, and as the situation became more strained, that risk deepened into positive certainty.

But in taking such a view of Christ's consciousness we cannot see any difficulty in His use of this figure to His disciples. He may not have had any clear prevision when He first said this that His own death would be by crucifixion; and yet this word would

not be unnatural. As a matter of fact, in the reference to His own sufferings, as the disciples came down from the mountain with Him, Jesus is not recorded as saying anything of the method of His death; and yet He almost immediately follows it by this call to take up the cross.

The suspected difficulty probably arises from the fact that the cross is unfamiliar to our Western and modern mind except in its religious significance and suggestion. We forget that in the ancient East it was a common method of criminal punishment. We look upon Jesus as using a term that was only explicable in the light of His own crucifixion. We must translate it into our modern and Western equivalent in order to see how readily, and in itself, it carries a meaning to the hearers. If we should say to-day: "You must follow a truth, even though it lead you to the scaffold or the gallows," we should be rendering a perfectly plain idea. So when Jesus spoke of the cross He was not using a strange figure of speech. He was saying, in face of growing opposition and menace, "These things must not turn us back. You must follow Me, even as I must follow the Father, though it lead us to the scaffold."

We do not need the crucifixion of Jesus to explain His use of this figure; rather this figure and this spirit account for the crucifixion. We need not say, "Only a man who knew he was going to be crucified

would speak like this," but rather " a man who took this attitude towards life was likely to be crucified." We should not artificially use the after-events of Christ's life to explain the mind of the Master, but naturally take the mind of the Master to account for the events.

What we see, then, is that there came a point in our Lord's life when He saw unmistakably that His gospel was going to be dangerous to Himself. He had early accepted the fact that it meant a cleavage between Him and the leaders of the official religion, that it separated Him from the current conceptions of the Messianic kingdom, that His " I say unto you" must stand in sharp antithesis to the tradition of the elders. The day came when it was evident beyond doubt that the result of the breach would be the violent suppression of Himself. Destiny said to Him, in accents that could not be mistaken, " If you go on, it is at the risk of life; the end of this way is death."

Surely this would be a real problem for him, as for any man. It forces home upon the mind a consideration of the values of things. " Life is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing to behold the sun." Is there anything of greater worth still? When John Milton was offered the Latin Secretaryship to the Commonwealth he knew that the price of the service would be his eyesight. He had to balance the worth

of his eyes against the worth of the commonweal, and we know how his decision was taken.

When the Lord saw persecution and death blocking His way He had to face them. There was not simply the question of courage, there was the question of policy. Is anything to be gained by pressing a truth upon the mind of a people who are not prepared for it? Is it of any worth to lay down the life for a message the world does not want? Is it not a giving of that which is holy to the dogs, a casting of pearls before swine? Were it not better to shrine the truth in one's soul and bide the time?

The answer to such questions was to be found for Jesus only in one way—in communion with His Divine Father. What was the Father's will? However He sought it, and whenever it was revealed to Him the Father's will was unmistakable. Christ was to go forward unfalteringly. The truth He taught, the saving of men for which He cared, the love He felt for them, were worth dying for, were to be pursued through death and by dying for them. "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life for the sheep. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself . . . This commandment received I of My Father." In the fulfilment of God's purpose the Son of Man must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things. The mind of the Master was so sensitively attuned to this

that the well-intentioned interference of Peter jarred it into stern rebuke. "In suggesting that I can avoid this thou savourest not the things of God." There is no doubt of our Lord's sense of the imperative of suffering and sacrifice. It was the only way; it was God's way. Truth, and righteousness, and love, were worth dying for, and only through sacrifice would they have their way with the hearts of men.

But Christ does not simply stand under the imperative of sacrifice Himself. He laid it, as we have already observed, upon His disciples, not incidentally or with any note of apology, but putting it emphatically into the very statement of discipleship. "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." To these men whom he loved He said: "Suffer with Me." He did not attempt to shield them from the cross, he laid it upon them.

There is a profound interest in this. A selfish nature often avoids suffering and sacrifice itself, while both consciously and unconsciously imposing them upon others. But the first and commonest instinct of love is to protect those whom it loves. It gives itself unsparingly, it faces danger, it makes sacrifices to shield those to whom its heart is bound. The hen gathers her chickens under her wings in the hour of danger. The mother pinches herself and pretends that she is not hungry in order

that the children may be fully fed. The man with a dangerous enterprise afoot finds some reason for leaving wife and child behind him that they may not be involved in his perils. Love, tender and gracious love, finds it relatively easy to make sacrifices, but it shrinks from letting its sacrifices rest upon others. Its whole inclination is to say, I have no right to make others suffer. Many a man, faced with a great moral issue that involves pain and loss, says: "I would not hesitate at all if I stood alone; but my wife and family would be involved too, and I cannot ask them to sacrifice themselves."

Surely love is very beautiful when it stands thus shrinking, even though the integrity of its own soul is concerned, from laying the cross on others. Is there room to question for a moment its goodness of heart? Can we imagine a greater or better love than this? It seems so. For the quality of this love that shrinks from asking another to share its sacrifice is that, rightly or wrongly, it regards the other as weaker than itself. There is a defect in its trust, it loves down from a superior position. When it is dealing with known weakness it may be justified; but it may sometimes in its very tenderness dishonour the object of its devotion by imputing a weakness that does not exist.

It may be robbing an answering love of its rights by treating it as less than an equal, and when its

protective subterfuges are discovered, it rouses a certain indignation against its mistrust. Barrie's "Little Minister," in his student days, suspects his mother of pretending that she has had her dinner before he comes in, and, crying that he will not be treated any longer as a child, insists on her sitting down and eating mouthful by mouthful with him. The wife who discovers her husband in a time of business depression pinching and depriving himself that she may know no diminution of household comforts claims with indignant courage to be allowed to bear her part of the common burden. She says: "You do me wrong in only letting me share your bounty. Love me with faith enough in my love to let me share your need."

There may be a more luxurious satisfaction in the love that is jealous of keeping the sacrifice to itself; but there is something more honourable, faithful, true to the loved one, in the affection that is willing to share its sacrifice. When our friends bring us their joy, their happiness, their wealth, and say, "Share these with us," we are glad, for we know that they are *our* friends; but when they bring us their sorrow, their trouble, their poverty, and say, "Share these with us," our hearts leap as they never leaped to their joys, for then we know they count us as *their* friends. When the father compasses his child about with protection and care, the child is

happy, for he knows the father's love; but when later, the father comes to his son, and opens up his difficulties, takes him into his councils, and hints at sharing the burden of the business, then (if he is worthy of the father) the son experiences a finer thrill, for he knows that he is his father's son, that his father loves him no longer as a child but as a man. When love is not afraid to claim sacrifice, we know that it thinks of us no longer as weaklings, it trusts us and honours our strength.

Can you see the illumination the thoughts we have just suggested bring to the word of the Lord? Christ, who Himself stood under the imperative of sacrifice, did not hesitate to press the same imperative on others. This gracious One, who would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax, whose compassion is beyond all question, yet says to His disciples: "Take up the cross."

You have sometimes repined and grumbled at that word. Christians have spoken of cross-bearing with sighs and melancholy as the necessary but sad offset to the blessings of their religion. But will you realize that in no word He speaks does your Lord do you such honour as in this? When He says: "Come unto Me and rest," when He offers you His benefits, gifts of healing and forgiveness and comfort, He makes you His beneficiaries; but when He offers you His cross He treats you as men. He does

not then condescend to your weakness, He appeals to your strength. He trusts you to be able to love Him as He loves you. When He lays upon you the imperative of sacrifice He deals with you no longer as with children, but as sons, joint heirs with Him in the kingdom of God. When He says "Share the fellowship of My sufferings," He treats your humanity not as a feeble and emasculate thing; He confesses its vitality, its capability, its power to rise to His level. He credits you with being able to love Him nobly when He says "Take up the cross."

The earlier pages of the Acts of the Apostles tell how, when the apostles were haled before the Sanhedrin, and beaten and forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus, "they departed from the presence of the Council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name." Paul proudly speaks of himself as filling up what was lacking of the sufferings of Christ, as bearing about in His body the marks of Jesus. Peter and James in their letters repeat the same note. These men all loved Christ, not only with their weakness but with their strength. They knew and felt that the greatest proof of His love to them was not in any one of His kindly words, but in this hard imperative He laid upon them. They rejoiced in the cross as the sign of their spiritual dignity and freedom. Christ loved

them, not as slaves but as freemen, when He counted them worthy to suffer with Him.

The highest honour the Lord can do any man is to share His cross with Him. When He says to His disciples, "You, too, must make sacrifice for truth, for redemption, for the love of men," He includes them under the same law as Himself; He credits them with being able to feel as He feels and to respond to the Eternal Spirit as He responds. The call to take up the cross may be hard and difficult, but it is the highest honour of the Christian life. It is the last clear proof that Christ loves a man, not merely as a sinner, as a weakling, as a lost child of the house of Abraham, but as a man who can return love for love and faith for faith, as a man who can suffer and be strong, as a man who can lay down his life for his friend.

VI

THE IMPERATIVE OF SACRIFICE—II

VI

THE IMPERATIVE OF SACRIFICE—II

" If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."—MATTHEW xvi. 24.

IN our last study, in considering the imperative of sacrifice under which Christ Himself stood and the kindred imperative which He laid upon His disciples, we saw that that love is the highest, and does most honour to the one beloved, which is able to say, not only " share my joy," but " have fellowship in my sufferings." But there seems some necessity to carry the subject a little further in some consideration of what taking up the cross means.

The actual sign of the cross has in the course of the Christian centuries received a kind of æsthetic glorification. Celtic and Gothic art have dissolved its severe lines into the traceries of beauty. The wealth of the Church has been lavished to make it splendid. It has become part of the ornament of Christian dress. It has been wrought in gold and precious stones. The lady wears it on her necklace, the gentleman upon his watch chain ; it is gilded upon the prayer books and devout manuals of the pious.

There might be something wonderful and suggestive in this if people really remembered what they were beautifying and wearing as an ornament; if the maid thought that she had fastened upon her neck and the man that he had hung upon his chain an ancient instrument of criminal punishment. If we could imagine people making a little model in gold or pearls of a gallows, or a gibbet, or a guillotine, and wearing that as an ornament, we should realize the full significance of the transfigured cross. It is a very ugly and sinister thing, whose whole suggestion is of horror and punishment till made beautiful by the thought of One who endured it, suffering wrongfully, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. All the strength of that thought was in the mind of the apostle when he said: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He was boldly claiming that the ugliest fact in his Master's history was the fairest and most splendid.

The cross in Christian ornament has only a spiritual and æsthetic significance so long as that is remembered; and, unfortunately, it is so largely forgotten that most Free Churchmen regard it rather as an ecclesiastical and ritualistic badge than anything else. As the sign of High Churchmanship, more than of any personal tribute to Christ, it has been somewhat rigidly banished from our architectural

and personal ornament. But the idea of the cross, and of cross-bearing, has been prominent enough in our religion. If we have not thought so much of wearing the cross, we have talked more of bearing it. We have sung it in our hymns, we have expressed it in our experience. We have avoided the temptation of turning it into a mere æsthetic symbol and fetish, we have avoided the elevation of the mere material thing ; but the writer is not sure that we have not sometimes run the more serious danger of degrading its spiritual meaning.

We do lower its significance by calling *crosses* things which have no right to such a name. It is true that Christ said: "If any man will come after Me let him take up *his* cross"; but that does not give us the right to call any burden or disability that we find irksome a cross, and on the strength of that to speak of ourselves as cross-bearers. Both the term and its idea receive a certain definition from the lips of Christ, and yet more truly were raised to an awing significance by His own crucifixion. In the light of the cross of Christ there is surely occasion for a little restraint in regard to what we should call a cross in our own lives.

There is a story that a wealthy religious man, having taken home the minister to his house, and sitting with him in all the sumptuousness of a luxurious room, but by a fire that was smoking rather badly,

said: "Ah, sir, we all have our crosses, and that chimney has been one of mine." There is a touch of caricature in such a story, but it is no more than a touch. We have been too ready to speak of any trifling inconvenience—a frail temper, a slight indisposition, a disagreeable neighbour, a peevish child—as our cross. Surely while we can use the word so lightly there is a want of proportion and balance in our estimate of things. We have lost the sight of Calvary and its Divine Sufferer, when we can borrow His cross to dignify such trivialities. We need to rescue the term and to restore it to its Lord.

An ordinary weakness of our moral nature, a bad temper, a jealous disposition, some evil habit that we have allowed to grow upon us until it is no longer easily cast off but still fetters our movement, some harmful association we have made and that now forms a hindrance upon our freedom, these are not to be glorified by calling them our crosses. We would not speak unsympathetically of such things; how should we? Which of us does not stand under these limitations? They are sad and pitiable, and in them we must needs think kindly and helpfully of one another, trying to bear one another's burdens. But they have no claim to this high name.

In these matters we are largely gathering what we have sown and reaping what we have scattered.

If we find a bad temper crippling our usefulness today, we have chiefly to thank the years when we let it go unchecked. If we are hindered by some evil habit of the past, we must humbly recognize that we bound the burden upon our own shoulders. If there is any likeness to a cross in these things, it is not to the cross of Christ, "the Man who had done nothing amiss," but rather to the cross of that sinner crucified with Him, who said, "We indeed suffer justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." The fetters, the burdens, the limitations that are set upon our lives by our inward weakness and failure, or our past follies, are to be regretted and sorrowed over. They are not simply to be borne, they are to be overcome. They are things we are to try to be rid of: "Laying aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us." The bad temper is not to be sighed over, but to be conquered; the evil habit is not merely to be lamented, but to be mastered. In these things reside the self that we are to deny. Let us beware of indulging our moral weaknesses by calling them crosses. It is fatally easy to get into a mood of self-pity by giving a too-flattering title to our faults and defects, and so to end by putting up with the moral limitations of which we ought to get the better.

Again, the disability, the inconvenience, the misfortune that come to us in the ordinary course of

life cannot take of necessity their title from the cross. Some sickness which has a perfectly well-defined cause, often a foolish indiscretion, the breach of a natural law, some loss in our business, some thwarting of our personal plans, any of those hundred and one changes and upsets that life brings to us all; these things, which are the common lot of humanity, do not win the right to be called crosses simply by happening to Christians.

They are to be faced, and borne with courage, patience, and endurance. We are to play the man under them. But there is a certain good taste in reference to them that is not always observed by Christian people. If we incur some loss while pursuing our own business, we should not try to cast a kind of religious afterglow over it by talking of it as our cross. If we get wet in following some personal pleasure, and are laid up for a week or two when it is inconvenient to us, we may not speak of ourselves as being resigned to bear our cross.

There is no unkindness in the writer's thought in saying this. The common ills of flesh and blood, the rough and tumble of life, are hard to bear, and we have the right to call our religion to our aid, to fortify ourselves by every holy thought, to pray for help and blessing. But we may well be jealous for so high a term as the cross. Our Lord has lifted it above all little things, and we ought to keep it high.

If any justification is needed for what we are saying, let us remember that the Apostle Paul, than whom none was ever more eager to bear the cross after his Lord, yet hesitated, when in Galatia he had a physical infirmity that hindered for a time his work, to speak of it as his cross. It was his thorn in the flesh, and he prayed that it might be taken away. He learned that God's strength might be perfected through his weakness, and he said that he would therefore glory in his infirmity; but even then he did not call it his cross. It was not of this he was thinking when, in one of the most impassioned passages of his letters, he wrote of himself as filling up what was lacking of the sufferings of Christ.

His restraint in the use of the word is readily understood. The cross for him had not only a quite definite but also an awing and exalted significance. It was the expression of the saving work of the Lord. It was inevitably associated for Paul with the idea of redemption, and the idea of redemption was as necessarily associated with the cross. The cross was the expression of the suffering and condemnation which fell upon the Lord through His fidelity to His mission. It was the burden laid upon Him because, having come into the world to bear witness to the truth, He would do it; because, having loved His own which were in the world, He would love them unto the end. He reached the cross in the fulfilment of His

Father's purpose. He had to suffer many things and to die, because in a world of sinful men He would accomplish the work that was given Him to do. The cross was the undeserved and unmerited penalty of One who held truth higher than life, and the will of the Father more imperative than the gainsaying of men, and the salvation of man more worthy than personal security and peace. It was the last and profoundest expression of the redeeming passion of the Master that He endured the cross, despising the shame; that He laid down His life for His brethren; that He counted not His own life dear unto Him.

A word into which He has put such wealth of meaning must not have its currency lowered. What the cross was to Christ defines its meaning when He says to His disciples: "Take up the cross."* It is not a word to be used lightly to cover any suffering and inconvenience that may occur to us in the ordinary course of things. It is not to be used of trouble that may fall upon men deservedly through their own fault and weakness. There is blood upon this word—the blood of martyrdom and sacrifice, of self-devotion and fidelity; and there must be some

* This is not contradictory to the passage in the previous study, where it was maintained that the use of the word "cross" in this text had no special reference to Christ's own crucifixion. The fact remains that between us and that saying now stands Calvary, and that we can never behold the cross again save with "the light of sacred story gathered round its head sublime."

passion of redemption, some zeal for the kingdom, some faithfulness of truth, before we can take it to ourselves.

The words "If any man will be My disciple let him take up his cross," cannot be divorced from those brief and pregnant syllables that complete the sentence: "and follow Me." They are a call to us to make common cause with Christ, to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, as the Lord Himself did, to share His redemptive purpose, to have fellowship with the travail of His soul. They are a call, not only to be saved, but to join with Him in saving others, to hate the things He hates and love the things He loves, and to follow Him, not alone to rest and security, but to work and service. The Lord did not wait to say "Follow Me," till for Him the bitterness of death was past. He said it while His own crucifixion was still in front, and He identified His followers with Him. He said: "It is going to cost Me pain to do My redeeming work; you must come prepared for the same cost."

In His earliest calls to discipleship you notice that Jesus said simply: "Follow Me," and then, as He found men too easily responding, He threw into individual cases a note of warning: "The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Then at the last He put the whole seriousness of His

commission into the call. He said: "If you would follow Me you must take up the cross. Neither I nor you will see the Father's kingdom without sweat and without blood. Your service must be sacrificial service. You must be prepared to work till it hurts you. You, too, must think the truth worth suffering for, redemption worth an agony. You, too, must be ready to go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, as I also go."

There is no doubt what alone in our Christian lives has the right to be called a cross; the suffering, and inconvenience, and loss, which come to us directly through our union with Him in His purposes, through our service to Him, through our zeal for His kingship. There is not "a cross in every lot," in spite of the hymn, but only in the life that identifies itself with Him in the saving of men and in the work of righteousness. There is no cross except where there is a redeeming spirit.

We do not take up our cross when we bear bravely the ills that flesh and blood are heir to. That has its own merit and its own Christian worth, but it is not cross-bearing. The cross is not offered to us as a term for sanctifying our common troubles, that we may gild with its name burdens that have little relation to Christ and into which slight thought of His empire enters. No, all that is worthy to be called a cross in our lives is the suffering, the self-

limitation, the sacrifice, that are the direct expression of our fidelity to Christ and our passion for the saving of the world. When we lose in our daily life because we will not deny our Lord, we may humbly and thankfully call that taking up our cross. When our hearts bleed to help our fellows and for love of them we spare no toil and avoid no contumely, that is cross-bearing.

Taking up the cross has one clear meaning on the lips of Christ, and one only: it means the sharing of the redemptive work and the redemptive spirit. It was to that He invited those who would be His disciples. He asked them to be co-workers, and, if need be, co-sufferers with Him. If anything is necessary to keep that constantly in our memory (and how often it has been necessary, as the Church has grown indifferent and cold); it is ever before us in the memorial of the Lord's Supper. "Take, eat; this is My body. Drink ye all of this cup." These words mean nothing if they do not mean that we are to live in the spirit of this life laid down, and as we have freely received freely to give—our best of sacrifice, our best of work, and our best at once of joy and sorrow.

VII

THE IMPERATIVE OF LOVE

VII

THE IMPERATIVE OF LOVE

"A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you that ye also may love one another."—JOHN xiii. 34.

IT was the beginning of the evening of many sorrows, an evening that was to merge into a night clamorous as the day, and break into a day dark and gloomy as any night. For Jesus there was to be no more sleep, and for the disciples only the burdened and swiftly-broken slumbers of those who sleep for sorrow. He alone knew how near was the end, and He took up a word they had heard Him say before, and repeated it with a new application of dismay to their own hearts. "As I said to the Jews, 'Whither I go ye cannot come,' so now say I to you, Only a little time am I with you." There was no avoiding the meaning of such direct utterance, and before the supper table was left, the Lord was to dwell upon it with an emphasis which would make it still more certain. But for the moment He touched upon it only to hurry past it. He caught their sad, questioning looks at one another, sounded the sudden sense of loneliness that had fallen upon

their spirits, shared their vision of themselves left without the Master who had held them together.

They had been quarrelling just before the hour of supper, quarrelling like children; which of them should be the greatest had been the heated theme of debate. The discussion had fallen to silence on the entrance of the Lord. They had grown ashamed of it, as He had taken upon Him the form of a servant and washed their feet. Now it was forgotten. They drew together in alarm and distress. It was as though Jesus said to them: "Ah, My children, sorrow has made you momentarily forget your differences. That I am going away has blotted out everything else. Sorrow is a strange solvent of strife and division; but it is not permanent, they may easily recrystallize again. The sick bed, the grave, the house of weeping, make a truce in many a feud; but a truce may not be a lasting peace. You must find a stronger bond than your regrets. A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you." Once again the imperative given springs from one that has been fulfilled.

It is not yet the missionary imperative, the message of universal human love. We gain nothing by trying to enlarge the new commandment beyond its natural scope. This text has its limitation, and to attempt to widen it, is only to loosen, not really

to enlarge. For the present the greater world is shut out ; the publican and the sinner, the multitude of Israel scattered upon the hills like sheep not having a shepherd, lie beyond its circle. Jesus is thinking of and for His intimate disciples, these men who are all linked by the tie of close personal friendship to Him, but as yet only imperfectly attached to one another. Of what use is it to lay upon them the order of a larger love till they have learned to love those of their own fellowship ? If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love humanity which he hath not seen ? This word is addressed to the Church on its own behalf. Its bearing is mutual ; love of one another is its note. It appeals to Peter on behalf of John, and to John on behalf of Thomas, and to Thomas on behalf of Nathanael. It is spoken to those who already love Christ.

In a previous study we noticed the uncompromising, and at first glance unpromising, basis on which Christ rested the offer of His personal friendship : " Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." A similar note of surprise awaits us in the present word. To put the call to mutual love in the form of a command does not seem promising.

It is true that both we and these disciples are familiar with it in what Jesus Himself described as

the great commandments of the old law. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbour as thyself." But our Lord in that discussion had recalled these words to the minds of His hearers as something that was largely forgotten, and the fulfilment of which had sunk to convention and formalism. They had probably never regarded this as a commandment in quite the same sense as the definite and concrete precepts of the law. It was the expression of a pious duty, the practical obligation of which was met by obedience to the multitude of precepts dealing with the acts and relations of life.

In this interpretation their duty to God was met by the fulfilment of the ritual and other commandments of the priestly code, and the necessary duty to the neighbour was satisfied in keeping the social enactments of the law. But when Jesus brought back those two great words into the forefront of His hearers' minds He regarded them as something other than a summary of the various acts of worship and conduct which the older religion involved. He said: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." There was something in them which could not be expressed in a definite series of acts, which was not fulfilled simply by piling line upon line and precept upon precept. A man might fulfil every literal enactment of the

law, be scrupulous in worship and in social duty, and still be far from these greater words.

When Jesus said the words, "Thou shalt love," we may be sure that He gave them their full emotional and inward wealth of meaning. Love is a disposition of the heart, it is a spirit underlying the act and the word. When He said to His disciples: "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another," He was not, we are certain, ordaining certain outward acts, He was not saying merely "Behave towards one another in a particular way." He was laying an imperative upon the heart; He was commanding the spirit. His word meant literally what it said: not act as though you did love one another, but actually love one another.

It is so that we come upon the difficulty and surprise of the text. A commandment to a definite act we can understand. "Thou shalt not steal" faces me with a rule I can obey. I can command my hands. I may want to take what is not mine, but I can refrain from doing so. But when one says: "Thou shalt not feel like stealing," the order becomes much more difficult. My thoughts are more independent than my hands: they are elusive, swift, hard to rule. They seem to come and go in spite of the effort of the will, and, as many of us know, to determine not to think a certain thing is to provoke it to dwell tantalizingly upon the confines of the mind.

So to say: "Thou shalt do helpful acts, speak gently, give a cup of cold water to the thirsty and the weary," though difficult, like all positive morality, is yet a call to an obedience I can render. We may make ourselves do definite things, though there is no natural inclination of our spirits towards them. But when one says: "You must want to do these things, you must love your fellows," the mind springs back the question: Can love be commanded? We can rule our hands, we can direct our feet, we can to a lesser extent and with difficulty govern our thoughts. But can one command his love? Is it not of necessity spontaneous, natural, free?

We all remember instances when we have tried to make ourselves like a particular person. We have brought our acts and words to heel, but our inward prejudice has remained stubborn and intractable. A master may say to me: "Go," and I will go, or "Come," and I will come, or, "Do this," and I will do it. He may say: "Do not quarrel with one another," and we may abstain from quarrelling, however bad we feel. But can he say: "Love one another," and we shall do it? Can I change my feelings at a word?

So we find ourselves here facing not the question of the right of Christ to lay such an imperative on life, but the question of His power to do so. Is such a commandment as this possible? Considered

simply as a verbal order, of course it is not; and yet, since Christ does not hesitate to use these words, there must be reality in them. He believes that He does possess an imperative here, and it is a new one: "A new commandment give I unto you."

That is worth pausing upon. So far as what it ordained was concerned there was practically nothing new in this word of Jesus. He says no more than the older law had said before him. We must look for the justification of the epithet *new* in the second clause of the text. The newness of the commandment was in the nature of its authority and power, the character of its reason and motive. Let us read the word again: "Love one another, as I also have loved you that ye may love one another." You will see that we adopt a marginal reading that has much to commend it. Our Revised Version makes Jesus repeat the command the second time, with the qualification "as I have loved you." But the reading we have adopted suggests not only that the reason and the standard of Christian love are those of the Master, but also that the power of it lies in the Master's love. He says, practically: "This new commandment is no arbitrary, impossible thing. It follows naturally from a new fact and condition in your lives. Every new fact that enters into life conditions its actions: it either enlarges or limits its possibilities; it brings it under new

commands and imperatives. That I have loved you is the new fact in your lives, and the new commandment springs from the new fact that has made it possible. I have loved you that ye may love one another."

Thus once more we see the imperative on the lips of Christ, finding not only its right, but in this case quite literally the spring of its power in the imperative Christ Himself fulfilled. None will question that He stood under a strong imperative of love. He loved not by any outward command, but by a deep inward constraint, loved by the force of His communion and fellowship with the Father, who is love. He could not help it, necessity was laid upon Him. The sight of Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep not having a shepherd filled Him with compassion. The vision of Jerusalem, so unready to be helped, so careless of those who were sent unto her, dissolved His heart in pitying grief. The least response, whether of publican or sinner, drew from Him the warmth of friendship. Upon this little band of men who had followed Him He poured out the wealth of His affection without stint or measure. They knew it and felt it. He appealed to it knowing that there was no room for question. His love, His friendship, was the great new fact in their lives; and it was that fact that constituted the new commandment.

It is this love of Christ that at once constitutes and provides the power for this new imperative. It is quite true, as we have already said, that we cannot love simply at a word, a verbal command; but love itself has a certain imperative voice. Paul had recognized the experimental truth of this when he wrote in his epistle: "The love of Christ constraineth us." Jesus says to this little body of disciples: "I love you all, Peter and John and Andrew and Thomas, and you all love Me. My love constitutes a bond between you; you have a friendship in common. It must constrain you towards one another; you must love one another. You cannot live in My love, you cannot remember it and dwell in it, without being drawn to one another. My friendship is a commanding thing that does not allow hostilities and differences in its presence."

Have we not often in smaller ways realized this imperious power of friendship to cement friendship? We have been at some social function where the host himself was shy and awkward or only in a perfunctory way interested in his guests, and in consequence the spirit of the assembly has been cold, differences have accentuated themselves, and lines of cleavage have been clearly marked. On the other hand, we have been in the company where the host was so friendly and intimate with all his guests, where we were all so assured that we were

there as his personal friends, that we were constrained into closer friendship with one another. Small differences were broken down in the genial warmth, and we were insensibly drawn to present our best to each other. So in our more intimate circles also are there not friendships which have grown out of a mutual friendship? We have been drawn to one another by sharing a common love, and by the realization that the mutual friendship we shared could not remain at its best unless we allowed and accepted its natural tendency to bring us together. Even thus out of Christ's love for the disciples and their love to Him grew this new commandment. It was a natural and necessary imperative. They could not enjoy him to the full unless they drew together.

Out from the mists that hang about the morning hours of the early Church there has come down to us a remembered phrase, a golden word, that shows how this constraint then worked. "See," it was said: "how these Christians love one another." In the centuries that have since gone by it has often been repeated in bitter and savage irony; and that it should be so little possible to say of many modern Christian communities that they are linked by a bond of mutual love is sad, and it is saddest for what it means—that the love of Christ does not constrain us, that our realization of His loving presence has

grown cold. For it must mean that. The love of the brethren cannot decline where the love of the Master is maintained. It is a pitiful confession when we have to make it, but in that confession there is one gleam of hope. It says quite clearly that the one way back to that warmer fellowship which is the very life of the Church is by getting back to and realizing afresh the love of the Master. Let the love of Christ constrain us, and the new commandment will work out its own fulfilment and we shall love one another.

VIII

THE IMPERATIVE OF REST

VIII

THE IMPERATIVE OF REST

"He Himself was in the stern asleep on a cushion." —MARK iv. 38.

"And He saith unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile."—MARK vi. 31.

THE lesson of our present subject is not destroyed by the fact that on the particular occasion from which these words are taken the rest to which Jesus called His disciples was forestalled by the multitude. We cannot imagine for a moment that this was the only occasion on which the Lord withdrew His disciples into quiet places; surely this call was a relatively frequent one, although its recurrences are not recorded. Mark's narrative does not suggest that this was a unique invitation. His interest in relating it is not in the fact itself, but in the breach of it, in the evidence of the growing popularity of Jesus when the multitude could not see Him depart to the other side of the lake without following and thronging Him. But there were times, doubtless, when the Master and His disciples succeeded in avoiding the crowd. There were days when they had not time so much as to eat bread; but we read

also of seclusions when the disciples were able to ask Him privately of the meaning of His teaching, of a journey taken into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, evidently with the purpose of getting away from the areas of His popularity, and of a quiet retreat upon the slopes of Hermon. Even during the last week of His life, when Jerusalem was stirred and shaken by His presence, He succeeded in withdrawing each evening with His followers from the city and in finding a shelter in Bethany unbroken by the strife of tongues.

We may call this word an invitation, and it is so in the tone of its gracious gentleness, but it is an invitation with an imperative note in it. It is the doctor's order, the imperative of the Good Physician. This "Come," though kindly, is emphatic; it is a word of necessity, not to be disobeyed. He has observed the evidence of strain, the marks of fatigue. The disciples have been on a preaching campaign. Their success has been great, their labours arduous. They are excited and over-wrought on their return, and upon this excitement the news of the death of John in prison falls with a strange shock of revulsion. Jesus marks the heaviness of Peter, the tense strained nervousness of the Son of Thunder, the depression of Thomas; and it is with the authority of One who knoweth our frame, who understands its weakness as

well as its strength, that He withdraws them into quietness. There is in this word the peremptoriness of love, the same command that you sometimes try to exercise over a child or friend when you say: "It is no good, you will only break down if you try to keep up this pace; you really must rest."

Such an order is very easily given when we are not so deeply interested in the work over which our friends are exhausting themselves as they are. When we do not share their excitation we are able to regard their task with a certain aloofness. When we ourselves are moved by the same enthusiasm, and caught by the passion of kindred purposes, we do not so readily mark the signs of flagging weakness. The master with a great scheme on foot often tends to drive and urge his workers beyond their strength rather than to husband it, and, consumed by the purpose which to him is meat and drink, forgets that those who follow his lead may require more substantial fare. Saul, in the passion of a day of battle, puts a restriction upon his soldiers which leaves them faint and dispirited before the victory is won. It is therefore the more interesting and suggestive that the Lord, to whom the work in which He had claimed the fellowship of these men meant more than it did to them, and burned in Him with an ardour of which they knew little, should take thought for their

fatigue, and so carefully watch against the danger of over-strain.

The secret of this imperative of rest lies where we have tried to find the secret of every command of Jesus we have so far considered, in the fact that He Himself stood under the same imperative. We know little of the physical nature of our Lord, but here and there the Gospel story suggests that this great heart was enshrined in but a frail casket. A healthy mind may dwell in a healthy body, but health may not mean robustness and the iron endurance of the labourer. The mind that, even travelling afar after Christ, has had any delicate spirituality and clear vision of eternal things has frequently been linked to a body of sensitive and nervous, rather than of coarse and vigorous, strength. Without disease or constitutional defect, there are some who yet pay more for the motions of the exalted mind than others do for the exercise of the muscles and the limbs. Jesus sat wearily by the well at noon while His hardier disciples could still tramp into the town for food. He sank under the burden of the cross, which a countryman bore without unnecessary effort. In the hour of the crucifixion death found in Him a speedier victim than in the thieves who suffered with Him. In the Gospel narrative there are few pictures more pathetic than that of the Lord asleep on a boat-cushion in the heart of the storm. That He *could*

sleep while others were wide-eyed with fear tells of a mind at peace with itself; that He *should* sleep then speaks to us of weariness and exhaustion that were very real.

The writer of that Epistle to the Hebrews, which succeeds in combining the most exalted conception of Christ with the fullest sense of the caressing sympathy of His humanity, speaks of Him as "touched with the feeling of our infirmity." The figure of the sleeping Jesus makes a homely appeal to our hearts. It bridges over the gulf of difference of which we are conscious in His most splendid waking hours. There are times when we gaze upon Him from afar. His wondrous consciousness of the Father, His serene strength in emergency, His confidence under persecution and trial, His perfect and spotless manhood, His consuming zeal for the kingdom of God,—how far we have to travel to attain to these things, how remote He seems from us in them! But the weary hours bring Him to our side again. We watch Him asleep in the stern of the boat with a thrill of kinship that we have sometimes lost as He has gone before us in the way going up to Jerusalem, when as we have followed after we have been amazed. His dreams may be more beautiful than ours, but His sleep is like ours. The mother whose son is just beginning to break from domestic control, creeps to his bedside with a shaded candle in the night, and

while he sleeps in weariness and exhaustion, he is all her own. So we possess Christ in His slumbers. "The everlasting God fainteth not, neither is weary," but the Son of Man sleeps. He is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh.

From His sleep the Lord awoke, not only refreshed and ardent for the day, but with a tender thought and concern for the weariness and weakness of others. There is a sanity in His attitude towards the physical nature of men that is in marked contrast with the rigours and excesses of some of His followers. He masters the body by recognizing its just dues. The self-tyranny, the flagellations and scourgings, the harsh disciplines, which developed in the Church a few centuries later, were quite contrary to His spirit. They never accomplished His end, they produced rather a morbid and unwholesome consciousness of the flesh. The story of Christian revivals is marred by nervous phenomena—shakings, jumpings,epileptic seizures, imaginary speaking with tongues, excited mass movements—which have been taken by the ignorant as the sure tokens of the Divine spirit, but which are really unhealthy in their character, and which have in the end destroyed the effectiveness of the religious movement with which they were associated. They have been produced by playing upon the weakness and over-taxing the sensitiveness of the human frame. Certain types of missioners

are to this day constantly guilty, though often as ignorant as their audiences of what they are doing, of working up morbid and unwholesome results. The religious experience that is produced by wearying the body, by over-exciting the nerve centres, has always more of danger than of profit in it. When one is physically and nervously exhausted he is at his best neither for God nor man.

Our Lord's care for the body is wholesome and wise. How easy would it have been for Him in the wilderness, with the multitude that had followed His teaching in neglect of food, to have pressed the assembly the one step further that would have turned its exhaustion and over-excitement into a morbid revival! It has been done frequently in the history of religion. But as He notes the signs of unhealthy weariness He turns to the practical feeding of the multitude. He, who is so anxious to restore the soul, pauses, that He may restore the body. In the story of the raising of the daughter of Jairus we are almost surprised by the prosaic, and yet how sane, order with which it ends: "He commanded that something should be given her to eat." In one of the Resurrection narratives you remember how the disciples, excited, perturbed, over-wrought, had fished all night, and when, in the early mists of the morning, Jesus stood on the shore as they returned, His first question was: "Children, have ye aught to

eat ? " and His first duty was that of a host, for as they drew to land He said : " Come and break your fast."

So still we may be sure that among the imperatives of our Lord which we must hear and obey are not only those of service, and work, and obedience, not only the missionary calls that send us out in our Master's name, but also this gentle word : " Come and rest." We may sanctify our holidays and our quiet hours as well as our tasks. Our Lord wants not only our work, He wants our best work. He wants not only us, but He wants us in the ripeness of our strength, in the ever-refreshed vigour of our life. We are not truly honouring and helping Him, though our spirit is good, when we are doing so much that we are doing it badly, when we are undertaking His service with an exhausted mind or an over-taxed heart. If we are to be our Master's efficient servants we must have time to rest with Him as well as to work for Him.

This does not mean that we should do less for Him. From the mere physical standpoint an hour spent in wise rest or in the freshness of the open air is not lost. Re-invigorated, we do in the next hour the work that otherwise would have spread itself wearily over two. And after all, it is not simply the amount of our work that wears us out, it is not merely physical exhaustion from which the spiritual worker suffers

most; it is the exhaustion of faith and patience, of clear vision and hope. This call of Christ to His disciples was not alone to the rest of the body, though it was that; it was to a rest of the mind under the new burden with which He had charged it, to a rest of the soul under the fresh emotions with which it was filled.

Professor James, in his volume on "Pragmatism," coins the happy phrase, "a moral holiday." That is what Christ gave His disciples when He took them apart into the wilderness. He relieved them for a time of responsibility. He bade them throw off the burden of care, and just believe that things were in better hands than theirs. We are called to help our Lord in the redemption of the world, in the establishment of the kingdom we are to be co-workers together with God. We are, like Jesus Himself, to do the work of Him that sent Him while it is day. Yes, but the tendency of the strain of actual life is to make us forget that we are but co-workers. We measure what is being done wholly by our and our fellows' efforts, and incline to shift on to our own minds more than their true share of the burden. We, in no bad sense of pride, but rather in a kind of earnest blindness, over-estimate the sense of our human importance. We lose the consciousness of the unseen partner in the world's work. Our vision is full of the machinery, and we

accurately measure it, but we do not see the power. Our energy is unflagging, but our faith is dulled. The sin of the world, the largeness of the task, get on our nerves, and we dare not stop lest something should go wrong.

How often in our purely temporary work the same thing reveals itself. The man of affairs delays his holiday. He does not see how he can get away, he cannot be spared, he is absolutely necessary at his post. Perhaps he stops there till Nature bowls him over, compelling him to take rest; and then he finds that for a month or two things manage to do without him, that the great business has more power in it than he thought, and for a while rolls on apart from his control. So there is room in life for a moral holiday, a time when we put away the sense of responsibility and care for the world's redemption and rest awhile, just trusting God's work in His own hands and leaving it alone for a time.

Of course we need not point out that a holiday is justified only by its occasionalness, and a spirit of relaxation which may be right for an interlude becomes false if it is spread over the whole life. That faith without works is dead, being alone, is the normal truth; but there are hours when to let our work drop and simply believe in God is the best refreshment of the spirit and the sweetest promise of finer work yet to be done. Sometimes we must

stand still and see the salvation of God. The activity of God is so constant, and sure, and wonderful, and yet so silent, coming not with observation, that you have to pause to realize it. You may brush hurriedly through the woodlands, so intent on your journey's end that you miss all that is happening there. You may go and lie down on some fair slope in the springtime, hushed, still, inert, and in a little time you shall cry with Stevenson's latest hero: "Everything's alive, thank God! Everything's alive."

Our Lord spent quiet nights upon the hills, His own work laid down, His ear attent to catch the throb of that Divine activity, the murmur of the looms of God. So He came back again to the city and the street with a stronger faith in God, confident of the great co-worker. "The Father worketh even until now." "I am not alone, but the Father is with me." He took His disciples over into the desert place that they, too, in quiet and untroubled faith might realize that the work they were engaged upon rested upon a greater than themselves, that behind Him and all the weary human workers there was God Himself, that when they were withdrawn from the city God remained, and when they returned He would be there. He said, and surely He says still: "Rest in the Lord, in order that ye may believe; and then, believing, go and work more surely and calmly for Him."

IX

THE IMPERATIVE OF PRAYER

IX

THE IMPERATIVE OF PRAYER

"The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing."—JOHN v. 19.

"After this manner therefore pray ye."—MATTHEW vi. 9.

MANY of the imperatives of the Lord we have already considered, splendid and exalting as they are in their character, are also hard and exacting, a call upon the heroism and energy of the disciples. In the fulfilment of them He Himself was taxed; virtue went out of Him in the task; and this could not but be true also of His followers. His own sense of and allowance for this we have observed in one of our studies. We have seen Him passing under the law of exhaustion, and, touched with the sympathy of weariness, laying upon the apostles the imperative of the Good Physician: "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile." Again, in the present study we are to see Christ exerting an imperative over His disciples, whose purpose is directly and immediately on their own behalf. This commandment is not primarily a service to others, but a help to themselves. It is

not a call to duty, it is a mandate of spiritual health and strength.

Let us emphasize that as we pass. Years ago John Ruskin threw some not unmerited scorn on the idea of calling our public worship "Divine service," and pointed out that when we prayed we were not serving God. Prayer is not chiefly a duty we owe to God, but a duty we owe to ourselves. The failure to pray is analogous not to the breach of a social law, but to the neglect of a law of health. It is not criminal, but foolish. There is no punishment for it any more than there is for not eating our dinner or taking adequate exercise; it is its own punishment. They who will not pray condemn themselves to hard labour and prison fare; they need no other to pass sentence upon them.

Prayer does not rest originally upon a Divine ordination; it is the natural expression and voice of the need of man. It is to your interest and well-being to pray. But the Lord's imperative to it is not therefore the less insistent. The true mother is as urgent in keeping her children to the laws of health, to regularity of meals, and exercise and sleep, as in binding upon them the laws of social duty. The wise master is as careful in seeing that those conditions which make for the well-being of his assistants are maintained as those which make for the profit of his business.

There is no room to doubt the tremendous importance which Jesus attached to prayer. He has much to say of its power and efficacy. His own recorded life is an illustration of its constant employment. Yet His imperative in this matter was not simply a bare call to prayer. He had very little to say of the need of prayer. Only in relation to certain conditions of temptation does He say, simply and categorically, "Watch and pray." He takes the fact of prayer as a recognized and necessary aspect of religion for granted. He was not working among a prayerless people. His opponents were, after their own fashion, men of prayer; their ancient literature was full of its inspiration. Had Jesus simply insisted upon the importance of prayer, He would have found none of the Pharisees unready to endorse the emphasis. But, in fact, we find Him turning a sharp and penetrating sarcasm upon the prayer of the pious leaders of the day,—"The Pharisees, which for a pretence make long prayers"; "the heathens, which use vain repetitions." The vivid contrast between the two men who went up into the temple to pray, is an evidence of the stern discrimination with which He examined the devout pretensions of men. It shows how little He could be content to repeat a bare call to an exercise of the soul which was already fulfilled with so much abuse and so little reality.

Christ's imperative was not merely to pray, but "after this manner pray ye." His attitude towards prayer was not simply exhortatory, but also critical. He did not initiate, He redeemed it. He gave it a new model. His word was not a vague and general call to pray, but a call to a certain method, temper, spirit, and conception of prayer. The question which the Christian has fundamentally to ask himself is not whether he is regular and constant in prayer, but whether his prayer is after the manner ordained of Christ. The stress of this imperative lies not upon the fact but upon the fashion.

The former of the two texts at the head of this study is a remarkable and significant word taken from the fourth gospel, which seems to us to fix our minds upon the essential quality of the Lord's own prayer. "The Son," He said, "can do nothing of Himself but what He seeth the Father doing." The truth and maintenance of the filial relationship depended upon a living harmony between the Father and the Son. The thought is not, of course, that Christ's action was limited in any fatalistic way, that He was not free but determined, in spite of Himself by the will of the Father. That would be to take all the kinship and all the reality out of His manhood; it would be to make the temptation which we have already studied a mere verbal pretence that had no correspondence in fact. We may

rather turn to the temptation to help us in understanding this passage. It followed, you remember, upon that clear consciousness of Himself as the Son of God which came out of His baptism; its very sting was in the hypothesis: "If thou be the Son of God." Its appeal was to take doubtful or meretricious methods of establishing His claim. "The Son" had been His reply, "doth not live by bread alone, but by the word of the Father. He does not prove His Sonship by putting the Father to the test, but by worshipping Him."

The whole result of the temptation might be summed up in the word of the text. The Son can take no method to establish His Sonship that He does not see the Father using to establish His Fatherhood. If He acted otherwise than in accorddance with the Father, He would cease to be His Son in any sense of living fellowship. To take any method of proving His Sonship that was not in harmony with the Father's will would be to forfeit it. To pursue His work otherwise than on the lines of the Father's activity would mean that it would cease to be His work. All the power of Christ's ministry as the Son of God lay in the fact that He was *en rapport* with the Father, that He did what He saw the Father doing. The flow of power and energy came through the sympathy of the Divine and the human wills, from the common direction

of their activities, from the mutuality of their purposes.

Hence we are perhaps stating the central reality of the prayer of Jesus when we say that it was an effort of vision. He retired into the solitude of the mountains and into the quiet of the night that He might be able to see with a more undisturbed mind. To see what the Father was doing, to adjust the whole mind and purpose of life to that, was to make the one necessary connecting link by which the treasure of heaven could be loosed for the service of earth, by which light and wisdom and sure guidance and peace could flow into and through the life of the human Son.

In all our Lord's statements with regard to the Divine Fatherhood there is no suggestion of any unwillingness or reserve on the part of God that had to be broken down. The readiness of God to give good things, to impart His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, is the underlying thought of His utterance. We live in a world compassed about with spiritual abundance; if we have not, it is because we ask not or ask amiss. The cause of ineffective prayer is in the mind unattuned to blessing. The life that is doing things other than those it sees the Father doing cannot receive His power. Its prayer falls flat and barren, not because God is unwilling, but because it is unadjusted.

Modern thought has had some serious and damaging strictures to make on a good deal of Christian prayer. It has pointed to the stabilities of natural law, to the interplay of cause and effect in the workings of the material world, and asked somewhat sarcastically whether we expect by prayer to upset the established balances. We are not prepared to deny that there has sometimes been a triviality and slightness about our prayer which has justified some of the hard things that have been said about it; but we have only deserved them, we only fail in confusion to be able to answer them, when we come equally under the criticism of our Lord.

When our prayer is after His manner, it is not only true that modern thought cannot condemn it, but that it has analogies which tend to its support and illumination. Rightly considered, the attitude of the practical scientist towards the material world is one of prayer. He is always asking, seeking, knocking upon its doors for command of its resources. He asks Nature to provide the power to work his engines, to turn his machinery, to grind her own corn, to weave her own cotton and wool. She does so; but her one condition is that the worker shall get into harmony with her own working. He never accomplishes anything by breaking one of her laws. His whole and humble attitude has to be: "I can do nothing of myself but what I see Nature doing."

The flow of power depends upon the adjustment of his mind to her mind.

The invention and thought of the last few years has brought even larger suggestion to us than lies in this familiar figure. Nothing has been more fruitful in spiritual suggestion than the discovery of wireless telegraphy, not chiefly in the fact that messages can be conveyed over wide distances without other intermediary than natural and invisible currents, but in the fact that the condition is the attuning of the transmitting and the receiving instruments. Being set to a common key, as it were, power can flow between them. Telepathy, or the transmission of thought from mind to mind without the mediation of speech, is only slowly moving into the area of ascertained scientific fact, but none save the grossly ignorant are prepared to put on one side as unworthy of examination the ever-growing accumulation of evidence that the movement, the subtlety, and the potency of thought are greater and less easily accounted for than the materialism of fifty years ago concluded.

All these things, far from discrediting prayer as Christ conceived it, leave its position not only unassailed but flanked with supremely rational suggestiveness. Who, that recognizes the immense developments of material power that have accrued from getting into harmony with Nature and working

with her, doing what we see her doing, will dare to say that the spiritual power of life may not be enhanced by getting into harmony with the mind of God, and doing what we see the Father doing. If a machine carried in mid-ocean, with only the vast expanse of alien waters around it, can through its harmony catch and register the messages of a distant shore, who shall say that the mind that attunes itself to the spiritual world shall not register its messages, and that the heart which adjusts itself to the Father's purposes shall not find the power flowing into it that works through them ?

This is what prayer realized in the life of Christ. The secret of His power was in His working unity with God. For Him to share the purposes of God was to ensure the reinforcements of God's strength. To do the things which He saw the Father doing was to make certain the co-operation of the Father's power. The only real need of the prayer of Christ was to reconcile Himself to, and to make sure that He was doing, the Father's will. If the mind was attuned there could be no doubt of the light. If the will was in harmony there was no question of the power. Has it ever struck you that even in Gethsemane, where for an hour the heart of the Lord trembled before its destiny, He did not pray for power but for reconcilement to the Divine will ? When He had prayed Himself into harmony with the

Father's purpose He asked no more. He did not pray: "Father, if this is Thy will, give me power to do it." He prayed: "If this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, Thy will be done." When He had harmonized Himself with the Divine will, the Divine help was assured.

As we turn from the example of the Lord to that model of prayer which He set His disciples: "After this manner therefore pray ye," we see the practice of His own life translated into His imperative direction to them. Familiarity has blunted the edge of our wonder, but it is a truly wonderful prayer; and if we will examine much of our own prayer, its failure to get into the spirit of this model will seem more amazing still.

Out of seven brief petitions the personal needs of the human petitioner only appear in four, and in those we have the most artless summary of temporal and spiritual needs. The majesty and exaltation of the prayer lie in its opening clauses, in which only God fills the vision. "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth." It compels us to fill mind and heart with the Divine order of things. It is the attuning of the human to the Divine, of the earthly to the heavenly, a lifting of our lives, before we ask anything, into the light of the purposes and the ends of God. It is the prayer we should naturally expect

from Him who said : " The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He seeth the Father do."

Those opening sentences are indeed a vision ; in them the worshipper sees what the Father does, and the efficacy of his prayer depends on his rejoicing in and identifying himself with what the Father does. The secret of the Lord's prayer as a real spring of power is in these words. Its one initial and final hardness lies in the task of bringing oneself into the spirit of them. Our Lord invites us herein to share His position, to take the attitude of sons who can do nothing of themselves.

This is the key to harmony with the Divine mind, the open sesame to the treasures of the spiritual world. Pitch your mind in harmony with this and the power will come. It will flow into life, as when the sluice is lifted and the flood-gates are opened, will thrill into your being as when the electric circuit is complete ; for the power of God is ever present, and all that is needed is our harmony with Him to make it our own.

X

THE IMPERATIVE OF CARELESSNESS

X

THE IMPERATIVE OF CARELESSNESS

"Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink; neither yet for your body, what ye shall put on."—MATTHEW VI. 25.

"Be not anxious how or what ye shall speak."—MATTHEW X. 19.

IN using the title which stands at the head of the present study we are conscious that in our western and modern usage of the word it is more often one of reprobation than of approval. The word care has for us a double significance, and, though we use it for fret and anxiety, we also employ it for a virtue we commend. When we speak of a careful man we rarely mean a man who is full of anxiety, but rather one who puts effort, forethought and praiseworthy consideration into his work. When we speak of carelessness it is not usually to commend the absence of feverish worry, but to condemn slovenly, slipshod, and ill-considered labour. It is only as a state of feeling that we reprobate care; as an attitude of the will towards life it is almost ever a term of approbation. Even the word pain has shared the same redemption, so that we speak with

estimation of a man as "taking pains" or being "at pains" to do work well.

This is suggestive as indicating that latitude and longitude may reverse or modify the character of a virtue. The northerner and southerner have certain differences of character imposed upon them by the very condition of climate. To work too strenuously near the Equator is to run the risk of sunstroke or heat apoplexy; not to work strenuously enough near the Poles is to risk being frozen and starved. In the sunny tropics Nature herself, out of her teeming bounty, seems to commend a certain easy security. In the harder north she says, with no less emphasis: "You must toil for my benisons." We have looked out of our windows during the winter days, and, as we have watched the birds hunting among the fallen leaves for chance berries or searching the branches for one still undropped, we have wondered whether it could be said here with quite the same truth as in Palestine: "Behold the birds of the heaven, that they toil not." In the same way one is inclined to question whether in sunny and fertile southern lands, where Nature brings forth by handfuls, poverty can be so terrible a thing as it is in the colder North. A philosopher of the tropics, with his easy confidence literally needing to take little thought for the morrow, if suddenly translated into the far north would soon find himself staring

want in the face, if he did not alter his methods of life.

So the question may suggest itself quite reverently whether, if our Lord were here in our own land to-day, in face of the carking misery of many lives and the bitter effects of want in a not too friendly climate, He would repeat, without alteration or comment, this word : " Be not anxious," or whether He would appeal quite so confidently to the examples of birds and flowers. Would He go, for instance, to the seamstress of Tom Hood's ever memorable and, alas, still fundamentally true " Song of the Shirt," and say these words to her ? Would He go to the man who is genuinely out of work, who has tramped from town to town seeking employment, and say to him : " Behold the lilies of the field how they grow ? " If in the bare suggestion of such questions there seems anything shocking, it can only be through our rooted antipathy to thinking seriously and coming to close grips with our own New Testament.

We surely cannot doubt for a moment that Jesus would have the keenest sympathy with the tremulous anxieties of men. He, of whom it is written that He should not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax, would have no harshness for the weak and over-strained lives of our day, and if He repeated His ancient word, we are quite sure that it is not all

He would do. He would justify it by practical help. He would give them occasion to believe in Him as the basis of His appeal that they should trust in God. He Himself would help them as the proof that God had not forgotten.

You remember how indignant both James and John grow in their epistles over a religion that does not lead to this. " If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled, and yet ye give them not the things necessary to the body, what doth it profit ? " writes James. " Whosoever hath this world's goods and seeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassions from him, how doth the love of God abide in him ? " says John. Such passages, coming from the lips of men who had been in actual contact with Christ, indicate the practical sympathy with which the Lord imbued His disciples, and also suggest that the word of Jesus is not the utterance of one who was unacquainted with the actual problems of want and need. It is not the easy saying of one whose circumstances never faced him with the facts that put his doctrine to the test.

Both by natural conditions and social organization the inhabitant of Palestine was acquainted with hardship. The climate of the country was sufficiently wide in variation to call for constant fore-

thought. Though there were tracts that justified its ancient description as a land flowing with milk and honey, it had many fields where Nature required to be coaxed and wooed to yield her best. The social circumstances of the people, as reflected in the words of Jesus, reveal the presence of oppression and injustice. He condemned it with a voice of no uncertain sound. There are real and pathetic figures that cross the stage of which He is the central figure. The widow whose house has been devoured, and her sister whose two mites cast into the temple treasury are her all, the man whose share in the inheritance has been appropriated by his brother, the beggar sitting by the roadside, these are evidences that this saying of Jesus is not that of a sunny and dreamy philosopher. If He could speak thus in His own day, there is nothing so remotely different in our conditions as to suggest that He would not repeat His word still.

The first thing that we have to remember as we read it is that it was not a word of universal application. There were conditions under which anxiety and worry were the natural fruit of the lives men were living. Sin has its proper inheritance in the disturbing and unsettling of life. Upon the Pharisees and hypocrites Christ pronounces unhesitating woe. For a Jerusalem that did not know the things that made for its peace He can only prophesy tribulation and anguish. The Sermon on the Mount,

as we must not forget, was addressed to disciples, and what Jesus declares is the right of those who would love and serve God, to live as the children of God, to cast in the last issue the whole responsibility of their life upon the heavenly Father.

He says, if we may reduce His words to a general statement, that the material complications of life spring from two sources: firstly, the divided worship of men who would try to serve both God and Mammon at the same time; and, secondly the anxieties of men, who while having no desire to serve Mammon, yet reinforce and strengthen its position because they dare not trust God. From this there is no way out but through those who dare re-assert the right of man to live as the child of God. "Seek ye first His kingdom and righteousness," He says to His disciples, "and all these things shall be added to you."

Let us recognize at once that there is no incentive to carelessness in this word of the Master in that bad sense of the term to which we have already referred. Against wise forethought, earnest deliberation over plans and purposes, provision for the future, and faithful activity, Jesus not only has nothing to say, but in direct and indirect ways He approves them. The king calculating his resources in war, the virgins carrying oil in their vessels with their lamps, the wise merchant trading with and

increasing his talents, the provident housekeeper, the sower at work in the fields, the fisherman casting his nets, these are the figures of His parables. He preaches a gospel of work, but it is a gospel of work on the deeper ground of trust. He says: "Realize that you are not servants working for a master, you are children working under a father. You may work hard, prudently, with foresight, but in the last issue you need not be anxious. Put God first and then trust Him. Do right without fear, do not hesitate to live and act as God's child in God's world. He says: "I do not say that you will not have to work hard; you will. That is the lot of all who follow Me. We must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day. But you may banish care. If you serve the Heavenly Father, trust Him. Cultivate the faith of a child. Let that mind be in you which is also in Me."

The meaning is exactly the same in the second passage. Speaking of the trial and judgment to which His disciples may be brought, Jesus says: "Do not be anxious." Again, it is quite evident that He was not commending a random, slipshod abandonment of the mind to the impulse of the moment. He who said to His followers: "Search the Scriptures," who was Himself always teaching them and storing their minds with truth, was not recommending the neglect of the ordinary processes

of mental culture. The preacher or teacher who goes to his work without due preparation and thought finds no approval in this text. The Christian should be always studying and arming his mind against the day of battle. But behind all his work there should be a yet more fundamental trust. He may go to trial, he may face the unwonted circumstance as his Father's child. He need not worry or be anxious. The Father will be with him.

As we turn to search the actual life of the Lord, we find it an ever-wonderful exposition of this imperative. He worked hard and constantly, His life was passed under many disabilities. There were hours when He said: "The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head"; but beneath all else there was the calm consciousness of Himself as the Son of the Father, and He vindicated His right to live on God's earth as God's Son. We see in Him no trace of anxious thought. Day by day He pursued the work it was given Him to do, and we never see His mind drawn off from its purpose by any worry with regard to Himself. He did the will of the Father, and when He could not see to the end He trusted the Father Whose will He did. At the judgment bar there was the same absence of tremor and uncertainty. To all time the calmness of the blended speech and silence of Jesus before priests and rulers remains one of the wonders of history.

So His word has a kind of challenge in it. It is not merely the utterance of an easy optimism, it has the weight of His own life behind it. That men will not live as God's children in God's world is what is seriously wrong in life. To act as God's children is the only way to get things right again. That means many serious things. It means, as we have already said, coming under imperatives of service and obedience, of love, and temptation, and sacrifice. But, having said all these things, Jesus adds here something that is in beautiful contrast and relief. He says: "Work, serve, keep my commandments, take up the cross—*be not anxious, do not worry.*"

Almost every imperative we have heard so far has seemed to put a heavier burden upon the shoulders of His followers, and now He forbids them to carry it heavily. He says: "Exert your right as God's children, not only by doing His will, but by letting your lives rest fundamentally upon trust in His care. There is no real need in life for anxiety; this is a trouble that men create for themselves and for their fellows. You move in this in a vicious circle, for it is by the needless anxieties of men that they bind excusable and pitiable anxieties upon the backs of others. God never meant you to be anxious about living; He meant you to live. Trust Him, and you will find your faith justified."

That is how we interpret the meaning of Jesus;

and are we not right when we say that for most of us this word, which is intended for our comfort, is a more difficult imperative than that of taking up the cross? The writer repeats it, not as one who has learned to obey it, but as receiving it from the lips of the Lord with the justification of His own life behind it; and as he thinks of it, it has this illumination, which he has often pondered. He has seen many people who have no special cause for anxiety anxious and troubled about many things. But among the Lord's humblest and poorest disciples he has also seen this word of the Master's many times and in different ways exemplified; he has heard so many telling, with tears in their eyes, that God has never disappointed their trust, that he marvels at his own doubt and trembling half-belief.

XI

THE IMPERATIVE OF PERFECTION

XI

THE IMPERATIVE OF PERFECTION

" Ye therefore shall be perfected, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."—MATTHEW v. 48.

THE words which close what has been called Christ's new reading of the old law are startling enough to arrest the attention of the most casual reader. The call to perfection, and to such a standard of perfection, almost alarms us. Had we heard it from any other lips than those of Jesus we should think the speaker was using too strained and exalted a figure. It would seem that Luke, or the author of the source from which Luke gathered much of the teaching of Jesus, thought so too, for he renders this text, as you remember: " Be ye merciful, as your Father in heaven is merciful." Even that is sufficiently exacting in its demand, and does little to lower the surprising idealism of the word of Christ. It no doubt expresses the heart of the lesson conveyed, but there is something very suggestive in the form of Matthew's record before us.

We have already studied that new commandment of Jesus in which He enjoined the disciples to love

one another, and we recognized then the wisdom of the order by which, when He was about to leave them, He attempted to bind them together with the tie of a strong and mutual love. Men who could not love the brother whom they had seen were scarcely fitted to love humanity which they had not seen ; those who could not love their fellow-disciples were hardly likely to love their enemies or pray for those that despitefully used them. But, although the Lord emphasised from the table of the Last Supper this call to mutual and fraternal affection among His followers, they could not imagine that He was establishing a close and exclusive fellowship, for He had already early in His ministry spread before them a larger ideal. He had characterised and condemned that dual and partial relation to life which was common among His countrymen and had been handed down from old times : " Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy."

The ancient law had acknowledged a kind of double morality, one for the inner and another for the outer circles of life. Economically and socially a certain hardness was permissible in dealing with the alien which must not be shown towards the native-born. The Jewish prerogative in God, the consciousness of themselves as a peculiar people, much of their ceremonial law, and some of the later legislation and opinion with regard to inter-marriage with

foreigners, had all tended to produce a narrow type of nationalism. The Jewish people had certain natural enemies, such as the Canaanites and the Philistines; and even some of the prophets, for reasons of religious and ethical purity, had inclined rather to foster than to break down such hostilities. Even when actual warfare had ceased we see the persistence of such strained relations in the attitude of the Jew to the Samaritan.

We may be sure that the recognition of such a double standard of morality in life, that you may hate an enemy but not a neighbour, that you may "do" an alien but not a friend, acted wholly in one direction. Its tendency was to enlarge the word enemy and to diminish the word neighbour. Hostility and hatred were more likely to break into domestic relations than love and neighbourliness were likely to extend to foreign ones. Enemies would multiply faster than friends. To legitimatize hatred is like introducing the rabbit into Australia or casting a little foreign water-weed into the river Cam, very easy to do; but when it is done it is very hard to prevent it from extending further than you wish. So in the time of the Lord we find the word neighbour fallen from its grand simplicity into the arena of debate, and a lawyer able to raise the consistent question: "Who is my neighbour?"

But, however bad the consequences of this dual

morality, it may be not unfairly asked whether it was not fortified and supported by many of the conceptions of God to be found in the Old Testament? Is not God Himself represented as the friend of those who love Him and the enemy of those who oppose themselves to Him? Though it cannot be denied that there are many nobler thoughts of Him, there are pages where this is so. Nor can we wonder at those early and partial thoughts of God, for the appearance of reward and retribution in life is one of the earliest things observed by man; and prior to any conception of natural law it was almost inevitable that they should be considered as flowing from two separate principles of friendship and hostility in the Divine mind, a friendship to the good and devout, a hostility to the bad and perverse.

Before the close of the Old Testament we see these thoughts seriously shaken, not by the doubt of such a dual principle of morality, but simply by the fact that it did not seem to work true. Prosperity was not inevitably associated with the good nor adversity with the evil. Very bravely is the problem dealt with by the author of the Book of Job, in passages of the work of Jeremiah, and in some of the Psalms. But the popular currents of thought remained largely unaffected by them; and so in the time of Christ we still find the twofold relations of neighbourliness and enmity established as the twin bases of morality,

and able to justify themselves by the conception of a God whose own relation to His world had the same twofold foundation.

Jesus definitely opposed this dual, broken morality with a new one: "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you." In the word which He appends to it He shows Himself to be possessed of a conception of God fundamentally different from that of the common mind of His time. We may not credit Him, perhaps, with having an idea of natural law in our modern sense of the term, but He gives utterance to a word which is singularly in harmony with it. He says: "The most fundamental activities of God in His world cannot be said to flow from two principles of relationship, but from one. There is a wonderful equality and impartiality in His treatment: He makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good and His rain to fall on the just and the unjust."

The sentence is so brief and its truth so obvious that we hardly note its significance as we read. It would hardly be legitimate to build a truth with regard to God on the basis of this passage alone; but, as a matter of fact, we need not hesitate to emphasize it, because it falls into line with the general teaching of Christ. He says the two results of beatitude and adversity, which we see at work in the world, do not spring from any twofold relation

of God to the creation, but simply from the various relations of men to Him. God has not two ways with men, but one way, which becomes a way of peace or of war according to the behaviour of men. Behind everything else there is a great evenness in the benefactions of God. He pours out His gifts independently of the characters of men. The sunshine makes no choice between the evil and the good; the rain does not concern itself with the justice or injustice of men.

This seems to be an expression of that moral indifference of Nature of which Job and Ecclesiastes, and some who have lived since them, have complained. It is, indeed, the statement of a truth which some have observed with bitterness of heart, but at which Jesus looks in an entirely different light. To Him it is the expression, not of the moral indifference but of the moral purpose of God. The world is formative of character just because its fundamental benefactions are not based upon character. A world where sun and rain fall as kindly on the evil as on the good may not be the world which most aptly expresses the rewards of good and evil, but it may be the best world for turning bad men into good ones. As Jesus understands it, there is one purpose running in and through God's world, and that purpose is redemptive. The world exists, not as the final expression of God's judgment on character, but as the school for the

forming of character. Such rewarding of virtue and such punishments of evil as appear are only incidental to the great purpose of God that runs through the world, that of the development of goodness and the transformation of evil into good. Not immediately the judgment of men, but the making of men, is the concern at the heart of God.

That is the basis of that large impartiality of benediction to which Christ points. A world in which bad men received nothing but the exact reward of their evil deeds would never turn them from evil to good. It would fix their character and destiny ; it would not transform it. The only chance of evil being turned into goodness is not through the exact working of the law of retribution upon evil, but through the discovery that it is treated better than it deserves ; conversion is not by law but by grace. Redemption is neither by punishment nor by reward, but by unmerited loving-kindness.

The perfection of God, to which Christ points, is this one eternal purpose that runs through life—to turn evil into good, darkness into light, wrong into right, discord into harmony, and which fulfils itself, not by an exact judgment of men, not by setting them in a world where there is nothing but precise reward and retribution, but by surrounding them with a loving-kindness which they have not deserved.

Those who would work with God must work in

the same perfection of spirit. There must be room in their lives, not for two principles, but only one principle, of relation to men. Our Lord in His own work recognized Himself as standing under this imperative. Neither rewards nor punishments were His immediate concern. His treatment of men was not to be decided by what they deserved, but by what they needed. Nothing is more emphatic than Christ's repeated declaration, that, so far as His conscious work was concerned, judgment was not part of it. Men were continually passing judgment on themselves by the attitude they took up with regard to Him, but " I, Myself," He said, " judge no man." " God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Some Jews once presented to Jesus the request of a centurion with the commendation " He is worthy that Thou shouldest do this, for he loveth our nation," but there is no more evidence that this commendation affected the act of Jesus than that the Jewish condemnation of the woman taken in sin prevented Him from saying " Go in peace and sin no more."

Christ, in going about doing good, approved Himself as the Son of the Highest, who makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good. We never find Him asking pledges of respectability, never inquiring of anyone, " Do you think you deserve to be

helped?" His one consideration is the need of men, His one constraining motive that of seeking and saving the lost, of helping men to realize their lives, of making them the children of God. He does not always give them what they ask; His goodness is not an unthinking philanthropy, an ill-considered generosity. There were requests that He refused. But His refusal was never an act of judgment. He never refused because a man did not deserve to be helped. He never sent a man away saying "You are unworthy." When Jesus refused men what they asked, it was not because He condemned them as not worth helping, but because what they asked was not what they needed.

Upon the disciples He lays the same imperative. "Ye, too, shall be perfect, complete, single, simple, undivided, in the principle from which your life flows, as your Father in heaven is perfect." The consciousness of the Lord that He was not sent into the world to judge it reappears as an important element in His moral teaching. "Judge not, that ye be not judged, and condemn not, that ye may not be condemned." In that word our Lord was surely not speaking against the inevitable estimates of character that we are always making, and in the very nature of the mind must make, but He was condemning the tendency to make them into fixed and final verdicts by which our treatment is decided.

The rule of our Christian conduct is to be neither reward nor retribution. To treat men according to their deserts is not the law of Christ, and it is not the law of Christ because it is not the law of God, and it is not the law of God because it is not the way to make them better men. "Good, my lord," says Hamlet to Polonius, "will you see that the players be well disposed?" Polonius replies, "My lord, I will use them according to their deserts." To which Hamlet replies: "God's bodykins, man, much better! Use every man after his deserts and who shall escape whipping?" Therein the Prince of Denmark expresses a very Christian principle.

Do you realize that to help a man because he is worthy to be helped is not essential Christian morality? It is what much of the current ethics of the world amounts to, but in so doing you do not fulfil the law of Christ. To be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect you must help a man because he needs helping. On that basis it is often the unworthiest who need helping most. To sweep on one side the undeserving is a terrible thing when you think that they also have to appear before the throne of God. The root of Christian morality is the redemptive purpose, and the further a man is from the redemption of God the more concern he needs from those who have any love of the Father.

"Love your enemies," says Jesus, just because

the man in whose heart there is enmity needs help. It is not you he hurts most by his enmity, but himself. It is not you he is turning back from the Father's house, but himself. "Do good to them that hate you" just because the man who hates has much need of blessing. "Pray for them that despitefully use you," because their despite is a self-wounding from which much prayer is needed to deliver them. We preach as Christians a gospel of salvation; but it is little worth unless it is backed by a morality of salvation, a morality which is not based upon judgment, nor is retributive in its character, but has its spring in the Gospel message, and has the hopefulness and the joy of the Gospel in its heart.

XII

THE MISSIONARY IMPERATIVE

XII

THE MISSIONARY IMPERATIVE

" Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." —MATTHEW XXVIII. 19.

No study of the imperatives of Jesus would be complete which did not include the commission which sent the apostles forth to make disciples of all the nations, the commandment which laid upon them a mission wide as the earth itself. That such words should be the message of the risen Christ to them seems eminently reasonable. The whole tenor of the Gospel story demands that, sooner or later, such a universal and catholic order as this should be upon His lips. The opening clauses of the Lord's Prayer, the figures under which He described His place and function in the world's life, the parables of the kingdom, all point to some final commission in which every barrier and limitation is thrown down and the apostles' feet set upon the high road of the world. The prophetic utterance associated with the story from which these studies began : " Many shall come from the East and the West and sit down in the kingdom of God," anticipates this other word :

"Go ye and make disciples of all the nations." How should they hear without a preacher, and how should they preach except they be sent? But, as a matter of fact, it would make little difference if criticism decided that this word must be rejected as a genuine and authentic utterance of Christ, and regarded as an interpolation of the consciousness of the early Church.* Taken as such, its testimony is almost equally striking. If these words are not the record of an imperative actually given, they are still the record of an imperative felt and accepted. They were the order of a Christ known after the spirit, whether they were spoken by a Christ known after the flesh or not. If the text must be erased from the certain words of Jesus, the testimony of the Acts remains, telling of an authority which drove these men out beyond the limit of their own nation to carry the Gospel to remote peoples. Nothing can minimize the significance of the fact that this priceless fragment of the history of the early Church

* "This great final word of Jesus is worthy of the speaker and of the situation. Perhaps it is not to be taken as an exact report of what Jesus said to His disciples at a certain time and place. In it the real and the ideal seem to be blended; what Jesus said there and then with what the Church of the apostolic age had gradually come to regard as the will of their risen Lord, with growing clearness as the years advanced, with perfect clearness after Israel's crisis, had come."—Dr. A. B. Bruce, in "The Expositor's Greek Testament," vol. I., p. 340. *See also* "Moffatt's Introduction," p. 253.

which begins in Jerusalem ends in Rome. It starts in the capital of a subject people, it closes in the citadel of the world's mightiest empire. Whatever the exact nature of this imperative, before the sacred writings of the New Testament are completed we see the Gospel in possession of a strategic position whose value lies only in the Church's sense of a world-wide mission.

To-day, as we stand in face of that large vision which the recent Edinburgh Conference unfolded before us, most of us have little doubt of the universal mission of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Unless our hearts are strangely dulled to the wonder of the Church's history in foreign lands, to the miracles of grace that have still been manifested on the outposts of Christian work, while at home we have passed through the strain of criticism and reconstruction, we can hardly question the privilege of every people to come into the light of Christ, and the obligation of those who know Him to evangelize the world. Nor have those of us who feel the full force of the missionary appeal any doubt that it is the imperative of the Lord, the command of the Head of the Church which we obey. In claiming the whole wide world for Him, the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession, we are but realizing the implications of His own gospel.

But when we attempt to bring this into line with

our other studies, and to see this imperative drawing its authority from a similar one fulfilled in the life of the Lord Himself, it seems at first glance a rather difficult task, at any rate within the range of the human life of Jesus. It is true that if we take into account the tremendous implications of the Incarnation, if we allow our minds to dwell upon the classic passage in Philippians ii., we need go no further. We find ourselves facing Christ as the supreme missionary, the one from whom every missionary on earth is named. Every element of the missionary story—the journey, the removal from home and friends, the sympathetic identification with an alien race, the years of humble service, the persecution and misunderstanding, even the martyr's crown —are set forth on a scale whose magnitude transcends the imagination and baffles thought. And as we turn to this, we appeal to what has been again and again the lofty inspiration of missionary labour. There have been missionary heroisms and sacrifices which know no human peers, which have given the utmost men could give, which owe to no earthly example a debt they have not rendered back in full. Only this transcendent aspect of the life of Christ leaves them still debtors. Only this grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor, suffices to pale the splendour of their own achievements and urge them

on to a further height and a wider conquest. It is this vision of Christ whose imperative they can never exhaust.

But in no study of this series have we had to slip within the veil, to depart from the obvious ministry of Galilee and Jerusalem in order to see the Lord obeying the commandment He imposes; and it is when we look for this in the present case that at first glance the search is baffled. We are struck rather by the limitation of His ministry than its extension. His contacts with the foreigner are accidental rather than designed; forced upon Him, not sought by Him. The work in Samaria which John narrates in an early part of his gospel was the product of a chance meeting with a woman at the well. He has no intention of entering into the city, and, though a mission is forced upon Him which He will not reject, He stays there only two days. At a later time we read of the offence of the Samaritans because He was obviously passing through their midst on the way to Jerusalem. In His visit to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon no missionary purpose directs His steps. His response to the Syro-Phœnician woman was won from Him by a personal appeal whose self-revelation proved irresistible. His healing of the servant of a Roman centurion is a mere casualty. His ministry concerns itself frankly and confessedly with His own people, and round the work of the

disciples as He sends them forth He draws the same restricting circle. "Go not into any way of the Samaritans," he says, "but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Moreover, having once commenced this line of thought, we shall have to pursue it further still, and to observe that before the end came, He yet more narrowly limited His work. It is quite evident that He reached a point in His career at which, without abandoning His public ministry, He devoted Himself in a more marked way and degree to the development and culture of His disciples. In His large use of parabolic teaching He adopted a method which naturally separated those who were fit from those who were unready to receive His message, and His more intimate interest was in those who stayed to ask the meaning of the sayings. The Christ who began His ministry by preaching throughout the country the Gospel of the Kingdom, spent the closing hours of His earthly life, not in one last appeal to the multitude, but in secluded conversation with the twelve.

It seems, then, at first a little difficult to see that Christ's missionary commandment rests upon one which He Himself fulfilled. But as we look deeper into our subject we shall see that the only satisfactory explanation of His own ministry and the development it took is to be found in the missionary outlook.

Quite certainly the order, "Go into all the world," has no immediate realization in the life of one who hardly every stepped across the border of Jewish territory. If we look to find the fulfilment of the missionary command in the actual wide extension of His own ministry we shall be disappointed. Yet we have no doubt about the universal character of His gospel, that the words He spoke are indeed fitted to be good tidings to a far wider audience than the one to which they were spoken. As we read we recognize the impossibility of drawing a circle of race or colour, or geographical area, round His teaching. If God is the loving Father, if He is to be worshipped neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth, to what people that has sought after Him, if haply it might find Him, may not this be good news? "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Must not such a promise belong to weary and broken spirits everywhere? The spiritual and heart-searching idea of righteousness which the ethical teaching of the Lord reveals, where in it can we find any limitation which would make its challenging imperatives true for the Jew and not for the Roman and the Greek. What word that Christ made to glow with the power of His own personality—light, truth, life, peace—but answers to a need of all the world? Whether He Himself spoke to few or many, His

message is fitted to become the faith of the millions. It is a missionary gospel. How, then, shall we explain the apparent restrictions of Christ?

We must be prepared to recognize that the same imperative may work in two ways, that the very narrowing of Christ's work is the prelude to its widening, that the concentration of His ministry upon the twelve is directed by the same motive that sent them forth on a world-wide campaign. Inspiration and expiration are complementary processes. The arm is drawn back that it may more effectively deliver its blow. The arrow is pulled to the head upon the string that it may be speeded on a longer flight. The athlete runs back from the mark that he may gain the impetus for a longer jump. The great undertaking is taken into the deliberation of the small committee because it is too important to be left to the haphazard organization accidentally shaped among the crowd.

So it is just because Christ's mission was to the whole world, because He brought a gospel which was for many peoples and for every age, that its immediate expression was restricted. Glaring as the paradox may sound, it was its very universality that limited it. Because His work was to be world-wide he had to spend Himself, not in actually doing it, but in preparing the men to do it. He had to create what in modern language we should call the home

base of the mission. Because He had a mission to all humanity he had to devote Himself to making missionaries.

It is only as from the outset we give a universal aspect to the ministry of Jesus, only as we view it from the beginning as a missionary movement that we see in true perspective the course of His own work. Indeed, we must trace the missionary idea further back still to find it underlying the whole religious history and destiny of Israel. If the unique development of their religious ideals under the teaching of the prophets means anything, it means that it was their appointed task to be the spiritual teachers of humanity. This was their high calling. Men like Jeremiah and the Prophet of the Exile had carried their religious thoughts to a point at which they overstepped the narrow bounds of nationalism and offered to a people alert to realize it a task in the fulfilment of which all nations might have risen up to call them blessed. Had they responded to it Christ would have found the home base already prepared for His gospel to the world.

How far they had failed to realize their opportunity and privilege, how they had grown in separateness and exclusive pride, we know. But it was natural and in accordance with the Divine working that Christ should have first offered to them the chance to fulfil their destiny. The initial limitation of His ministry

was not a forsaking of its wider purpose. It was the attempt to rescue and utilize the Divinely-appointed vehicle for it. In its failure history repeated itself. Isaiah's doctrine of the remnant is fulfilled in the little apostolic group which represented all that Christ was able immediately to gather out of the life of Israel for the furtherance of His Divine programme. Upon the faith of these men, and not upon the faith of the whole of a revived Israel, He must build His Church. The hope of the world must rest for the present hour upon twelve men.

All His teaching of them is in the nature of a training for the ministry. That is never more significantly evident than in His last hours with the disciples. We can understand one who knows that his hours are numbered, that his life is almost run, desiring to spend them with his family, in winding up his affairs, and in the affections of farewell. But there is little of this about the last hours of Jesus. He is teaching to the end. It is (if we may use a modern phrase) a teacher's training class that is still gathered around the table of the Last Supper. He is concerned for them, not simply as His friends, but as the depositaries of His message. He is concerned for Peter's fall because of the part that Peter is designed to play in the proclamation of the Gospel. His whole discourse relates itself to the work they are yet to do in His name.

Behind the scantiest or the fullest report of these closing hours who can fail to see that here is the vision, not of a work that is ending, but of one that is only just beginning. The shadow of death hangs over the little assembly and brings something like despair to the hearts of those who sit within it. But as we review it to-day, and listen with calmer minds to the words of the Master, it is clear that, though the shadow of death was there, it brought for Him no hint of finality. Every word of the Lord, every quiver of His spirit before the expected hour of agony and pain, each memorial act, would be almost meaningless if we could think that to His own mind this was the limitation, the defeat, the end of His work.

It is the sense of His universal mission, of a Gospel that is true and remains true for all men, and of the responsibility that rests upon these disciples, that is necessary to explain alike the thought and feeling of the Lord. That command which the Church afterwards leaped to fulfil, "Go ye into all the world," must be conceived as unspoken, but ready to be spoken, behind the sadness of these hours. How else shall we explain their tense and quivering pain? If this was indeed the end, why such tremor in meeting it? Many men have come to the end, and even a tragic end, realizing it as such, with less disturbance of spirit than Christ displays. It was surely because He knew it was not the end, because

He knew it as the door of the great missionary purpose that burned within His spirit, because He knew what large fulfilment of His purpose hung upon and was inwrought with the event of the next few hours, that he trembled. It was because His death was not the end, but the beginning, that it weighed upon His spirits as never death weighed on life before.

If we began this study with the fear that it was not quite obvious that the missionary imperative Christ imposed finds its spring in one He also obeyed, we have to end with the recognition that as we read more deeply into the life of the Master we see Him under this imperative all the time. We discover that the very incidents and words that raised our doubts are only explicable in the light of that purpose. We see it so dominant in all His thoughts, that He only receives disciples to make them missionaries, He only draws them to Himself that He may send them forth. If the example of Christ lends any force to those other imperatives, it is concentrated with tenfold weight in this one. All the other commandments are blended in this, like the rainbow of the poet's vision :—

> " Its seven proper colours blended,
> Which still in the rising were compressed ;
> Until at last they coalesced
> In a triumph of whitest white."

If in various aspects of the Lord's life we have traced the other imperatives, it is in the very fulness

of His personality, in all that He was and did, that we find the inspiration which sweeps the Church onward and outward to the redemption of the world, and denies to it the right to call itself the Church of the living Christ except as it obeys this call.

XIII

THE IMPERIAL REWARD

XIII

THE IMPERIAL REWARD

"He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with Me in my throne, even as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in His throne."—REVELATION iii. 21.

IN choosing the key-word for the closing one of this series of studies we have departed for the first time from the wording of the Gospels, and have selected as the text of our subject one of the messages of the Spirit to the churches of Asia. The reason for this is not that we could not have found an appropriate word in the Gospels, but that this passage most briefly and significantly expresses the idea on which our thoughts are to rest.

We may remind ourselves again of the line our meditation has followed. We began by noting the impression of authority which the teaching of the Master conveyed even to the earliest hearers; and, observing how that verdict has been endorsed by ever new ages of life, we asked ourselves the question which was prompted among the first hearers: "Whence hath this man this authority?" We saw that He also was a man set under authority, He Himself fulfilled imperatives before He issued

them. And in succeeding studies we have seen that the spring and constraining force of every imperative Christ lays upon His disciples is to be found in a like imperative obeyed in His own life. We have considered Him as subject to His parents, and so claiming the obedience of His followers. We have seen Him taking upon Him the form of a servant, and demanding that others shall serve. We have seen Him loving His own, and ordaining that they shall love one another. We have seen Him widening His love to include the least, the last, and the lost, and calling upon His disciples to love the unthankful and the erring. We have watched Him taking His cross, and so not hesitating to lay it upon the shoulders of others. We have seen Him responding to the missionary call, and Himself imposing it on them. We have seen Him subject to the laws of physical fatigue, and calling His weary workers to rest. We have seen Him under the laws of spiritual expenditure and reinforcement, and inviting His followers to constant prayer. We have observed Him as He faced life in a spirit of quiet trust, and bade those who worked with Him not to be anxious.

Nor do we pretend that our study has been anything like exhaustive. We have only followed a series of leading ideas, but they might easily have been broken up into many more sub-divisions. For

practically the whole teaching of Jesus has this imperative note in it. We might have turned our attention to some negative imperatives of the Master, in which an abstinence was imposed upon the disciples on the ground of a restraint which He exercised in His own life. Or we might have extended our study to one or two conditional imperatives, illustrated in the instance in which He shows forgiveness to be dependent upon the forgiving spirit and mercy to be conditioned by the merciful disposition. But these are, after all, only amplifications or particular applications of some of the commandments to which we have already given our thought, and we therefore turn now to think of the reward of those who keep His commandments.

Without going deeply into the circumstances of the word at the head of this study and its relation to the church at Laodicea, for which it was written, we may readily grasp the central thought for which we have chosen it. It is that of power at once conferred and won. The text presents us with two wonderful transformations; we see the translation of obedience and struggle into victory. The Son, who has taken upon Him the form of a servant and been made in the likeness of man, sits down with the Father in His throne. The disciple who has been as His master, who has followed and served Christ, sits down with Him in His throne. The strict

application of the passage is no doubt to a future world. The writer of the Apocalypse is carrying our thought out beyond the regions of time and space, but the words are not without a present meaning also, and that is our immediate concern.

The key-note of our whole series of studies has been, as we have just repeated, that the power and authority of Christ came out of His obedience. He is throned even now as our king through His service. We rejoice to minister to Him, because He came not to be ministered unto but to minister. His humility has given Him the name that is above every name. His gentleness has made Him great. Out of His doing of the Father's will came His right to speak in the Father's name and His power to bring many sons unto glory. We have listened to His imperative voice, we have thought of our duty to obey Him, and as we have considered the fruits of the Lord's obedience so surely we have the right to consider the fruits of our own.

It is true that in the last issue the power of God is absolute. His commandments might be arbitrary. The clay has no right to say to the potter, "Why hast thou made me thus?" But our God is not unreasonable. He does not claim obedience as a despot, for the sheer joy of seeing Himself obeyed. His commandments are all with promise, whether the promise be openly expressed or not. Out of our

obedience always comes beatitude, out of the fulfilment of the law comes our liberty.

That is true even in the natural world. What we call its laws only seem imprisoning and tyrannous so long as in ignorance or in rebellion we try to break out of them. So soon as we recognize and accept them we find that the sense of being cribbed, cabined and confined in a narrow world falls away and our universe expands into an ampler place; instead of being the captives of a narrow cell we are the free children of a palace. Freedom in and power over the natural forces of the world have all come to us in a century which more than any other has recognized the limits of natural law, has listened to the imperative voice of Nature's own powers, and learned in material things the lesson of obedience.

If obedience is so blessed in the lower fields of being, it is surely certain that yet higher beatitude awaits it in the sphere of spiritual duty. We cannot run the way of God's commandments without having our life in every way enlarged. Our fulfilment of the laws of Christ must have other fruit than the simple consciousness that we have been obedient. What are the results of a conscientious fidelity to him? Even while we retain our position as ever under Him who is the captain and head of our salvation, they are rich and manifold. For us, too, obedience is the spring of a certain authority, power, and freedom.

We emerge through it into the ever-expanding liberty of the children of God.

Briefly we may touch upon a point or two of a very fertile theme. First, there is a growth in knowledge. "If any man will do His will he shall know," said Jesus, and know just the things which he needs to know most. For in the last issue what every one of us who has heard His words—so illuminative of life and destiny, so healing to the wounds of humanity, so re-assuring with regard to all that lies within the veil—needs to know is whether these things are indeed of God, or whether Jesus is only another splendid human dreamer saying rather what He hopes and imagines may be true than what He actually knows.

One of the most modern movements in philosophy is what is known by the name of Pragmatism. Empirical Science has discovered during the last half-century, in the more exact definition of its own limits, that the boundaries of the things we can prove are narrower than it once thought. The great problems escape from its net, and have to be dealt with in other ways. So the philosopher says that the one test of the truths upon which Science has practically nothing decisive to say is the practical one. We can only test our ultimate conceptions of things by the consideration whether they work, whether in the long run they tend to weaken or

enrich existence, whether they make for intellectual life or death, whether they moralize or demoralize men. The conception which works, which vitalizes and moralizes, must for men be nearest to the truth.

Professor James rightly says that Pragmatism is only a new name for an old method of thought. For the promise Jesus makes in that word we have just quoted is what the modern might call the Pragmatic test of truth. Out of our obedience to Him will come an ever-growing assurance that the doctrine is of God, because we find that it works, that it illuminates the dark places, and quickens the exhausted hopes and revives the declining faith in existence. The fruit of every hour spent in doing the will of Jesus will be the assurance that it must be true, because nothing else has ever worked in our lives with such effect. The heart knows that out of no bitter fountain of illusion could come such sweet waters of refreshing, out of no lie could such spiritual re-invigoration arise.

Young people are often tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, and in the clash of contending opinion are apt to think that there is no deciding factor that can be brought to the conflict but a new opinion on one side or the other. But that is not so. There are always those—and they are not always the learned and the wise, but sometimes very humble and quiet members of the churches—whom no wind

of doctrine blows about, whom no current of the thought of the hour can drift from their moorings. They obey Christ, and they know beyond the logic of the schools that in them His gospel has worked as the power of God unto salvation.

Yet again, out of obedience comes liberty. Although the imperatives of Christ are more exacting than those of the law, the essential and wonderful paradox of Christianity is that it takes out of life the sense of bondage. "Ye are not under the law but under grace" is its great declaration. That, of course, does not refer simply to the old Jewish law which for us has never been in force. Law, limitation, restriction, do exist for us. Like Paul, most of us hurt ourselves in our earlier years by kicking against the goads. The moral world is a prison-house. We are sure that we cannot breathe in its stifling and close atmosphere. Liberty is to be found only in breaking away from it; and some of us break away, and find that we have got out, not into a world of liberty but into one of new bondage.

Nothing is more significant than the fact that those who have kicked over the traces are not free; they always remain spirits in revolt. Every line in which they passionately declare their freedom is a confession that they are still bound. But the more completely a man obeys Christ the less does he find his life limited, the less inclined is he to wander

outside the range of Christ's influence, and yet the larger the world which has Christ for its centre becomes. He says :—

> "In a service which Thy Will appoints
> There are no bonds for me,
> For my inmost soul is taught the truth
> Which sets my spirit free."

Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.

Yet once more, out of true keeping of the commandments of Christ come both the sense and the reality of power. Superficially it may seem as though there was more evidence of power in revolt than in obedience. More sensational evidence there is, perhaps, but there is no method by which a strong man can be bred wholly out of revolt. All genuine power and capacity are gained by a painstaking and faithful obedience to rule and order. That is true from the playing of a game to the ruling of an empire. The graceful and free play of the accomplished cricketer, so suggestive of power and so little suggestive of mere rule of thumb, has yet been won by a strict and faithful obedience to the rules of the game. The splendid capacity of the statesman, handling men with consummate skill, grasping large principles, and keeping many issues in sight at once, with all its appearance of pure individuality, has been attained by a discipline of obedience. It is only out

of a thorough knowledge of law and rule that a sense of power comes.

Even so in the spiritual world; by keeping the commandments of Christ we gain gradually a feeling of sufficiency and mastery in life. Said a great apostle, after he had schooled himself for many years to the service of Christ: "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therein to be content," to be adequate to it. "I can do all things through Him that strengtheneth me."

Lastly, out of obedience to the Lord's will comes spiritual influence with men. There are those who possess authority among their fellows alike in matters of faith and conduct to whom the weak and the sinful turn instinctively for guidance and help. Without seeking so awful a responsibility, they become the confessors of earth's prodigals. The mentally perplexed brings his problems to them. The over-burdened life does not hesitate to cast on them a share of its load. The spiritually entangled look to them for release. Nor is the appeal in vain. Their sympathy helps, their touch heals, their word is with power.

What is the secret of an influence like this, of such a power as Henry Drummond so fully possessed of dealing with broken lives and shattered faiths? How shall we account for the living message of the pulpit or the potent beneficence of the daily life?

It is not in the gift of the man whose religion is a mere conventional acceptance of received beliefs, who can simply repeat, however attractively, the wisdom of the ages gone. Nor does it necessarily belong to intellectual and moral individualism. The iconoclast is always sure of his admirers. The man whose message is wrought out of personal thought, however whimsical it may be, is certain of an audience. Earnestness and conviction, however wildly flung their speculations, will win attention. We bend our heads willingly to those who can tell us any new thing, or whose thought seems to have overleaped accustomed ruts. But we ask something more before we will unlock our hearts. We do not confess our sins to the free-lance. Our secrets are not to be drawn from us by an aphorism.

No one will turn to the intellectual brilliance and originality of Drummond, great as they were, nor to his sunny and familiar speech, to find the explanation of his power with men. We find the secret of influence in the allegiance of life to the highest. It is out of faithful obedience to the commandments that must not be broken that power with men comes. It is the man set under authority at whose word men leap up. The lowliest of us, as well as the best, learns authority no less than obedience by the things that he suffers. We have strength to help others in proportion as we have been strong to obey the Lord.

This is the true reward of our fidelity to Christ—that our obedience is translated into power, that every commandment fulfilled enriches our personalities with a more wide-reaching influence among men.

PURITAN SEMINARY LIBRARY
Piggott, William Ch/The Christ imperativ
pgen
3 2965 00003 0581